OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER™

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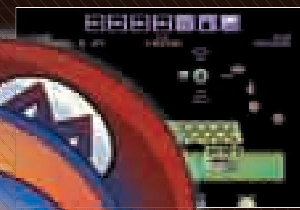
SUPER MARIO KART

HOW MARIO'S FIRST RACER HELPED KICK-START A BRAND NEW GENRE

THE MAKING OF…

WIZBALL

JON HARE AND MARTIN GALWAY ON CREATING ONE OF THE C64'S GREATEST GAMES





TICK, TOCK, TICK, BOOM!

SUPER BOMBERMAN

HUDSON SOFT CREATES ONE OF THE GREATEST MULTIPLAYER GAMES EVER

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

SIERRA ONLINE

AL LOWE ON THE ADVENTURE GAMING GOLIATH THAT DIED BEFORE ITS TIME

THE MAKING OF…

BROKEN SWORD

UNCOVERING THE SECRETS BEHIND REVOLUTION'S GREATEST ADVENTURE

IT'S TIME FOR A

RETRO REVOLUTION

REINVIGORATING CLASSIC GAMING WITH NINTENDO'S Wii

NINTENDO FEATURE BLOW OUT!

NINTENDO 64
THE CONSOLE THAT'S HAD MORE CLASSIC TITLES THAN YOU'VE HAD HOT DINNERS

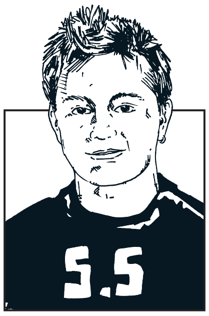
VIRTUAL CONSOLE
THE DEFINITIVE VERDICT ON THE Wii'S DOWNLOADABLE LAUNCH LINE-UP

DUCK HUNT
WAYWARD FOWL AND CHUCKLING DOGS. WHAT MORE DO YOU NEED?

PILOTWINGS 64
UP, UP AND AWAY WITH THE N64'S MOST RELAXING FLIGHT SIM

THE RETROBATES

MOST DESIRED VIRTUAL CONSOLE DOWNLOAD



SPANNER

Some kind of *Pang* derivative would benefit nicely from Nintendo's flash new Controllers. Other than that I'd quite like to see at least 50 different *Mario* titles

Expertise: Neo-Marxism

Currently playing: Exploring colossal caves

Favourite game of all time: *Mindless Moustachioed Malarkey*



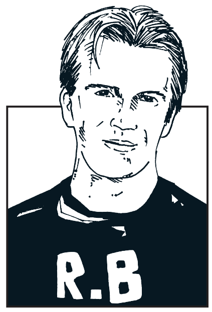
DAVID CROOKES

Super Mario Bros 3. This was a perfect start to the 1990s. *Mario* never had better power-ups than in this masterpiece game, which upped the ante on the whole series. Nintendo really committed itself to this title and it showed.

Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation

Currently playing: *Bubble Bobble Evolution*

Favourite game of all time: *Broken Sword*



RICHARD BURTON

I'd love to see a new *Star Wars Jedi Knight* game from LucasArts, giving you the opportunity to wield a Wii controller/lightsaber. I could finally get to be a Jedi Master!

Expertise: Spectrum and Amstrad games

Currently playing: *Highway Encounter*

Favourite game of all time: *Manic Miner*



JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

All kinds of obscure and rare stuff! *Sin & Punishment*, the entire *Goemon* series, *Super Mario RPG, Dracular Chii No Rondo, Sweet Home, Cave Story*, oh, and of course *Trampoline Gunmen.* All amazing games.

Expertise: Import games

Currently playing: *Trampoline Gunmen*

Favourite game of all time: *Trampoline Gunmen*



PAUL DRURY

Mother. I've never played it and a wise woman assures me my life is lesser because of this. But will I have to learn Japanese too?

Expertise: Getting programmers to discuss their drug habits

Currently playing: *Major Havoc*

Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*



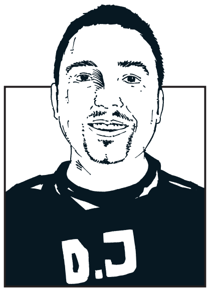
MIKE TOOLEY

Hellfire on the PCE, undoubtedly. Side scrolling shoot-'em-ups were seldom done so well, tight unforgiving gameplay, no health bar or power-ups to speak of, reminiscent of *R-Type* and *Darius*, gameplay over pyrotechnics, and no plumbers.

Expertise: Games that few have heard of and less have played

Currently playing: *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*

Favourite game of all time: *Mr Do!*



DARRAN JONES

It has to be *Sin & Punishment*, quite possibly the finest looking N64 games ever created. A highly unlikely candidate, but I can dream.

Expertise: Juggling a wife, two children and Retro Gamer

Currently playing: *Trampoline Gunmen*

Favourite game of all time: *Robotron: 2084*



CRAIG GRANNELL

Stunt Car Racer, if only for the extremely unlikely possibility that it could seduce a new generation of fans and lead to a long-awaited sequel.

Expertise: Games whose controllers don't require you to have 37 fingers

Currently playing: *Fist II: The Legend Continues*

Favourite game of all time: *H.E.R.O.*



SIMON PHILLIPS

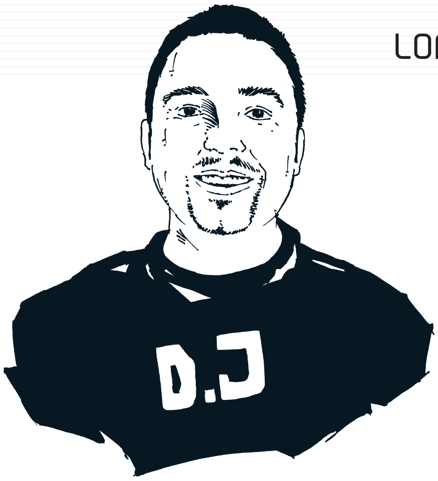
There's no chance of *Head Over Heels* ever appearing, so I'm plumping for *Fighter's Destiny*, an excellent N64 brawler that was shockingly dismissed by practically everybody.

Expertise: Juggling babies and work

Currently playing: *Doom* (Xbox Live Arcade)

Favourite game of all time: *Head Over Heels*

LOADING...



The sharp-eyed amongst you may well have noticed that Wil Overton's gorgeous cover features a next generation console on it and you're probably asking yourselves if Retro Gamer is going mad.

The reason I'm so excited about the Wii, is that I truly believe it's going to help revolutionise the way the general public perceives retro gaming. Of course, it would be foolish to give all the credit to Nintendo – after all, Microsoft has already made huge inroads with its Xbox Live Arcade service, and the likes of Capcom, Xplosiv and Sega have done wonders with bringing compilations of classic hits back into the public eye.

Nintendo though is promising to do so much more. A grand total of 15 classic games are on their way for the Virtual Console's initial launch, with Nintendo promising at least five new ones every month, and with the majority of Nintendo's back catalogue being so recognisable, you can guarantee that Mario and co are going to become even more popular than they already are. Don't take my word for it though, head on over to page 80 and prepare for the beginning of a new retro revolution.





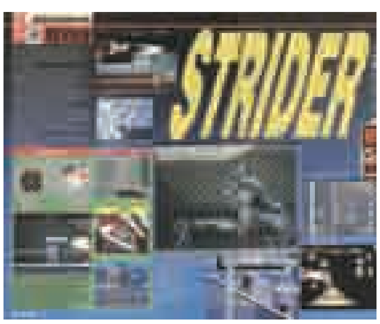


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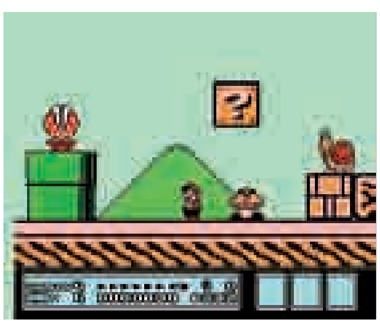
BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES

INSIDE
At-a-glance retro sections…









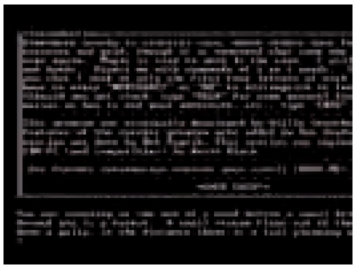
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THE ADVENTURE BEGINS...



RETRORATED

THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it

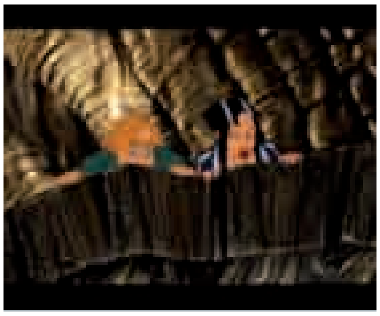




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THE MAKING OF...

WHY YOU MUST PLAY...

RETRO ROUND-UP

RETRO SCENE

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…



Martyn Carroll's computer of choice. He never left it alone.

DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

IT MAY HAVE BEEN SCALED DOWN, BUT THIS YEAR'S RETRO FUSION SHOW WAS STILL WORTH VISITING



Sega's *Sega Rally* proved particularly popular with punters.

Regular readers may recall that we greatly enjoyed last year's Retro Ball (Issue 20 if your memory needs a jog), as it featured pretty much everything you could ever want from a retro event. There were copious amounts of beer on offer, an impressive range of consoles, computers and arcade machines to play on, and the chance to rub shoulders with the likes of Archer Maclean, the Oliver Twins, Jon Hare and Rob Hubbard. All in all, not a bad way to spend a weekend. Oh, and did we mention all the lovely beer?

So, after enjoying last year's effort, we were a little disappointed when we once again arrived at the pleasant venue of the Warden's Cricketer Club at Kenilworth, mainly because the event was a world away from the boisterous cacophony of sound that had met our ears the last time we had visited. Don't get us wrong, we still had a fantastic time at Retro Fusion: A Weekend Of Gaming, and organiser, Chris Wilkins was as gracious a host as ever. It's just that after the incredible feat that Wilkins had achieved previously, this year's meeting was a far more low key affair.

The biggest problem with the event was that many people didn't actually know what form it was taking, mainly due to a new arrival to the Wilkins household. "My original plan had always been to put on an event the size of, if not bigger, than The Retro Ball weekend we had hosted last year," explains Wilkins. "The birth of my third child in June meant that my priorities changed somewhat and I soon found that I had very little time spare to organise the event to the scale that I had originally planned. The free time I did have was spent trying to work out what day of the week it was and then figuring out if it was actually am or pm – I was that wrecked! As a result I felt the best option was to cancel the whole thing."

Wilkins' vision then seemed saved when a number of friends and colleagues offered to help out in every way possible and a reinvigorated Wilkins quickly notified a variety of forums, publishers

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARCHER MACLEAN

Retro Gamer: This is the second event you've attended in Kenilworth now, what's the appeal?

Archer Maclean: I've enjoyed both events now. After all, it's always great to be able to meet up with a bunch of like-minded people and discuss your favourite hobby.

RG: Do you not get embarrassed when you meet fans that so openly worship your games?

AM: Nah! I'm proud of having created games like *Dropzone* and *IK+* and am constantly amazed that 20 years on people still hold them in such high esteem when in fact 100,000 (or more) other games titles have come and gone during that time.

I sometimes feel like Tim Allen's character in *Galaxy Quest*, although contrary to popular belief I haven't yet been kidnapped by real aliens…

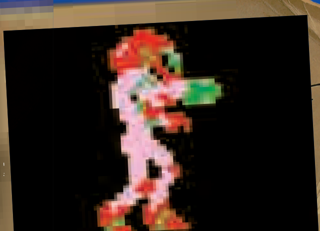
RG: So what was the most enjoyable thing about this year's event?

AM: The whole camaraderie of the day and the curry afterwards. Good on Philip Oliver for organising the retro ID competition too; despite how big the audience was he managed to get everyone into it like it was a few people down the pub. All in all, everybody really seemed to enjoy themselves.

RG: So did you kill the person who mistook the *IK+* fist symbol as being from *Way Of The Exploding Fist* in Philip's retro competition?

AM: He said he thought *IK+* was the best fighting game ever, and he'd willingly buy me at least two pints in homage to the great work I had done, and that whilst *Fist* was a great game *IK+* was 50% better for having three fighters in it. I then took my foot of his nuts and let him go to the bar.

HERO OF THE MONTH



SAMUS

Every month, Retro Gamer looks back at a classic videogame hero. This month it's actually a heroine, Samus Arun

First appearance: *Metroid*

Distinguishing features: Orange Suit

Weapon of choice: Wave Beam

Most likely to: Roll into a ball at every opportunity

Least likely to: Stay at home and raise a couple of kids

Unusual fact: Contrary to popular belief, Samus is actually a woman

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 12: RENEGADE

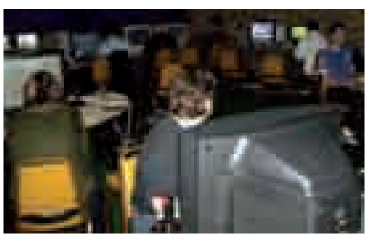
We were mightily impressed when the Amstrad version of Technos' gritty coin-op finally loaded up for the first time. Gritty in style, with a daring and exciting image, the titular renegade appeared to be quite happy kicking either male or female butt and even today just thinking about it makes us want to start a ruck. Brutally brilliant.



JUST IN KONAMI HAS FINALLY DECIDED TO ENTER THE UK COMPILATION MARKET. ITS KONAMI CLASSIC SERIES WILL DEBUT ON THE DS AND CONTAIN TWELVE TITLES INCLUDING CONTRA AND GRADIUS.



(From left to right) Darran Jones gives Martyn Carroll and Andrew Fisher a lesson in the beauty of Treasure's *Sin & Punishment*.



It may have looked rather foreboding, but there were plenty of great games to play on the day.

and magazines to ensure that the event would still be happening. But then disaster once again struck. "Unfortunately my new helpers decided that the commitment was far too great and walked away. It was nearly cancelled, but after various feedback I decided that the best thing to do would be to just turn it into a simple meet."

With Wilkins no longer having to worry about a large-scale event, it was simply a case of organising a day and waiting for the punters to turn up. And turn up they did.

All in all, around 80 people turned up for the first day, a surprisingly good figure considering that there had been so much confusion about whether the event would be continuing or not. JAMMA+ and their many arcade machines were noticeably absent, and there were no pachinko or pinball machines to play, but Wilkins and a few close friends made sure that there were plenty of machines to enjoy. Imagine a "bring a bottle night", but instead of wine you're taking along a couple of computers and an old TV.

It might not have been on the scale of last year, but there was still plenty of variety to be found on the many stalls that had been set up. "In total we had around 30 screens for people to use at the show and there were around 40 different computers and consoles to play on," confirms Wilkins. The venue's huge projector was used to play games and hold a number of competitions for the likes of *Sensible Soccer* and *Geometry Wars*, while Wilkins' JAMMA cab proved to be a huge hit and was rarely left alone. There was even a discreet Q&A session held by Philip Oliver and Retro Gamer columnist Archer Maclean, which went down extremely well with everyone who attended and lasted for two hours, with the unwavering duo never failing to answer the many questions that were constantly hurled at them. Philip Oliver even found time to do a small presentation about how profits for games are split up, which was perhaps the only cloud that settled on the event as everyone suddenly realised just how little money developers get for all their hard efforts. Other than that it was business as usual with both Maclean and Oliver being completely unfazed by all the adoring attention there were receiving from various fans. Indeed, you'd often spy them propped up against the bar, discussing the "good old days" with them as if they were all old friends. Retro Gamer also made its presence felt, with Martyn Carroll, Paul Drury and Andrew Fisher all finding time out of their weekends to play a few games, while record holders Tony Temple and Gary Whelan were on hand to discuss tactics on *Missile Command* and *Galaxian*.

Ultimately though, the star of the show was Wilkins. He may have been let down by a great many people and publishers in the run up to the show, but his boundless energy and passion for a subject he dearly loves rubbed off on everyone who attended (and spilled over into the raucous curry that evening). Yes, it could be argued that this year's show was a shadow of its former self in terms of presence and turnout, but there could be no denying that it was an enjoyable weekend for all who intended. And let's face it, that's what's really important.



Alright, so its not an old console but you can still play classic games on Microsoft's 360.



Galaxian hero Gary Whelan with his best world champion pose.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHILIP OLIVER

Retro Gamer: Did you enjoy the event Philip?

Philip Oliver: Definitely. Clearly it was far more casual than last year's, but that's because Chris is running it as a hobby and not as a huge commercial event, and due to various other commitments that have recently cropped up, he doesn't have time to organise everything himself.

RG: Will Blitz continue to support Retro Fusion events in the future?

PO: I really like Chris. He's a genuine guy that just loves his retro games. We'll certainly do our best to support Retro Fusion in the future if we are able to.

RG: You're quite a celebrity round here, how do you feel about the fan adulation you receive?

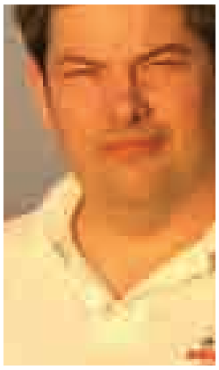
PO: It's funny! I like the compliments and it's good to see that all these years later people still refer back to *Dizzy* with fondness. Makes me proud and also drives me on to want to do something again that is as popular if not more so.

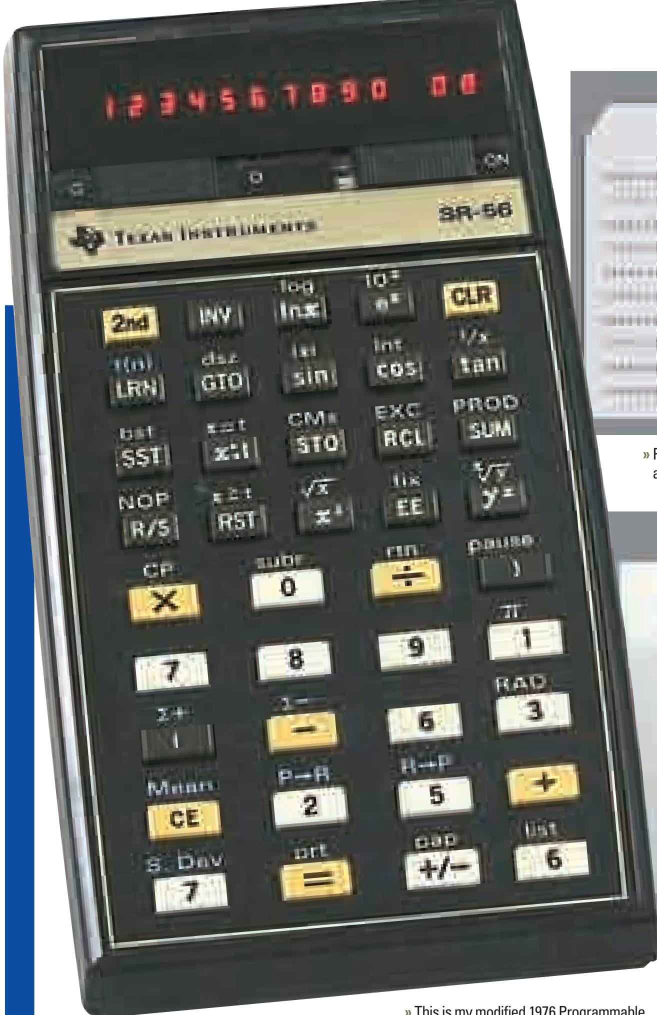
RG: Were you disappointed that more retro personalities couldn't turn up?

PO: A little, but it's understandable as it's harder for those that have to travel much longer distances; we're local so it's easy for us. Remember, we're all getting older and have busy lives and family commitments at weekends.

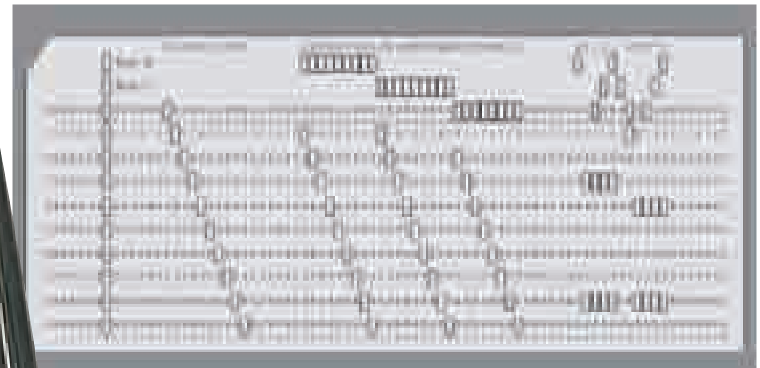
RG: Why do you think these gatherings remain so popular with everyone who does attend?

PO: Videogames are cool! These days they are still cool, but they are more faceless, having large teams and very formulaic approaches. In the Eighties there weren't teams, formulas and licences, just individuals trying things and some ideas were really fresh and worked. Some of the classics entertained people enormously and made deep, memorable impressions on people. Certainly games like *Pac-Man* and *Elite* did for me!

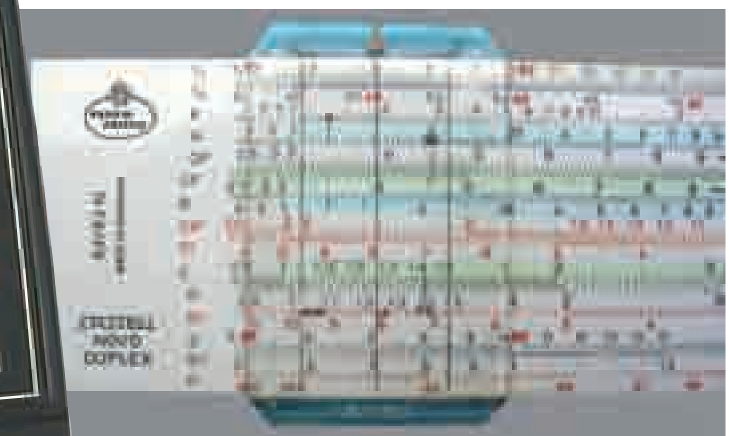




» This is my modified 1976 Programmable calculator in all its glory.



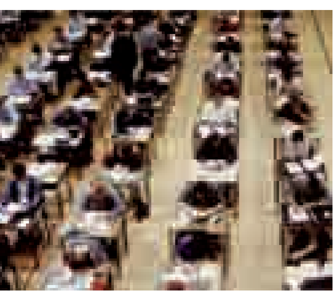
» Punched cards were even more hi tech and robust



» Answers with a slide rule were only as good as your eyesight.



» Debugging the code was a transparent process.



» Our school exams were usually held in the gym.



» A conventional 1974 four function calculator as popular in the playground.

COMMENT

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX ...

The very first actual programming I did was a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. The date was 1975, and I was being taught how to use punched tape at school. Yep – punched tape.

You were supposed to finalise the program using pen and paper, and only then would we very carefully use a mechanical punching machine to create the program using a series of 8-bit ASCII codes, one byte at a time, until we had a few feet of paper tape. This 'reel' would then be posted to a regional computing centre and we'd get the results back two weeks later. I still have a few rolls of my earliest code to this day, and a few still lost in the post.

The idea of paper tape with holes was first used on Victorian Pianola's back in 1890 and the principle hadn't changed in 85 years. If it got ripped or creased you were snookered. Bit like putting a magnet near a floppy disk. Sheesh, and they're obsolete too.

By 1976 I had 'advanced' to the stage of using punched cards, which were a bit more durable and the computer could read them faster, but the post system still took the same two weeks to give you your results, usually on giant reams of telex type paper with tractor feed holes down the sides. Often the depressing message was 'unrecognised op-code error' … after waiting two sodding weeks! Code development was slow in them there days.

Meanwhile, in the playground things were getting very competitive amongst us young-uns and the 'electronic calculator' was the big show-off thing to be seen with. But in the mid-Seventies calculators were usually simple four-function devices, with red LED displays or green fluorescent displays used mostly by Casio or Sharp, and you could have hours of fun, like, err, spelling words with the calculator upside down…

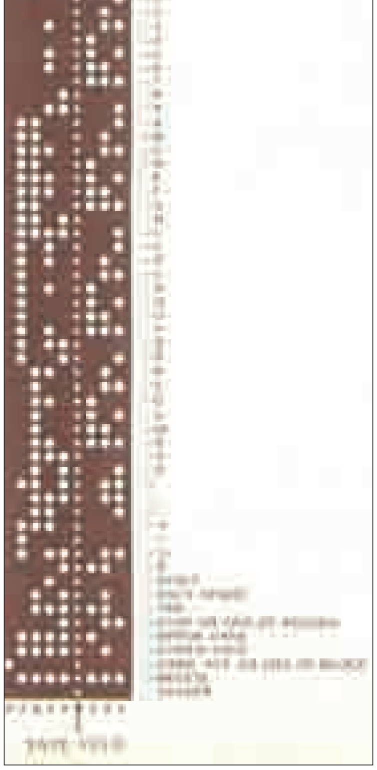
Generally, in maths lessons we were all taught how to do multiplication and long division by hand, as well as how to use log tables and slide rules to do anything more complex than just adding up. Even if you were one of the lucky ones with an electronic calculator, the teachers would argue that your batteries could go flat leaving you stranded, and besides slide rules and log books were always available in exams and usually handed out to anyone who asked.

But by 1976/7 many kids had these new fangled calculators and the pressure was on for the examining bodies to make a decision to allow them into the exam hall, even though no school wanted to foot the bill for replacing all slide rules with calculators as they were relatively expensive even then. But at the time I was spending my holidays with my dad out in Hong Kong, and that place was about three years ahead of any gadgetry you could buy in the UK including calculators. So I convinced my dad that my education would suffer unless my life was enhanced by the acquisition of a full blown programmable calculator to help with my homework, and thus future proof my needs for years to come.

Sure enough he coughed up the $100 needed (a lot back then) to buy a Texas Instruments SR56 100-step programmable calculator, which I still have to this day and it still works 30 years on, except the keyboard looks a bit different to normal…

I became addicted to this calculator and learnt how to program it every which way you could think off. The very first 'game' of any sort I ever programmed was a simple *Moon Lander* type game, where I would

"I WAS HORRIFIED AT THE THOUGHT OF LOSING MY TI SR56 MASTERPIECE SO I DECIDED TO RE-ARRANGE ALL THE KEYS ON THE KEYPAD TO MAKE IT A SOD TO USE" ARCHER MACLEAN



» In the beginning was paper tape. As used in pianola's in 1890, and schools in 1975.

show rocket-height, fuel-left, and descent-speed. And all in under 100 bytes! Good early training for writing compact game code a few years later.

Anyway, back at school I deployed the beast in one memorable physics lesson, threatening to use it in forthcoming exams, and the teacher blew a fit. Meanwhile there was still no clear decision by the examining boards as to whether they were to be allowed. So our particular school made its own decision for one year only, in 1977, … BUT … imposed a simple condition on anyone wanting to use a calculator….

They decided that because exam questions were more about the application of knowledge to solve a task, the task wouldn't be made any easier by having a calculator, so they took the decision to allow calculators. However, because some calculators were getting really sophisticated and they needed to make it fair, they insisted that all kids going into the exam with a calculator had to stick a name label on the back, and put it through a big box with a hole in the lid. Once all were rounded up, we were than allowed to stick our hand back in the box and pull one out at random… no kidding!

I was horrified at the thought of losing my precious TI SR56 programmable masterpiece and ending up with someone else's super-simple Casio. So I decided to dismantle my calculator, re-arrange all the keys on the keypad to make it a sod to use.

Turns out I needn't have worried because on the day, only about 20 per cent of the people had a calculator, and when I put my hand in the box, I could easily 'feel' for the big fat heavy one and sure enough pulled my very own calculator back out!

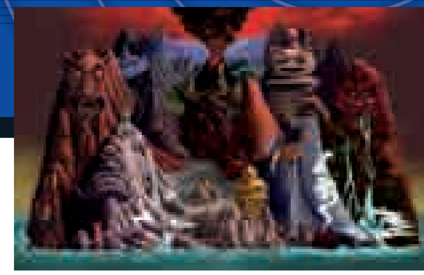
But I hadn't anticipated this result, and ended up shooting myself in the foot because it was a right sod to use!

And the moral of this tale is … thinking outside the box doesn't always pay off.

ARCH



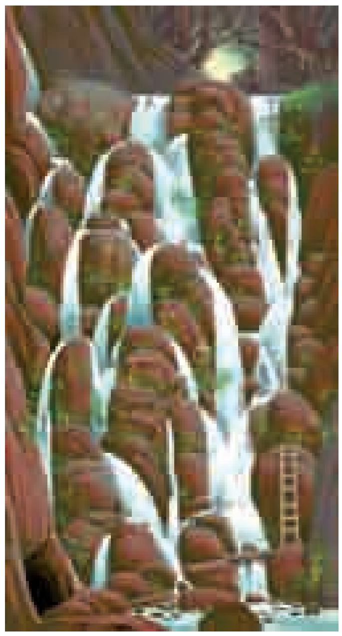
» We suspect that this will raise millions of pounds.



» A stunning piece of art that could be all yours. If your wallet is deep enough…

CHARITY EBAY AUCTION

RETRO GAMER DOES ITS BIT FOR CHILDREN IN NEED



» Another stunning piece of Zelda artwork by Rob Dunlavey for all to admire

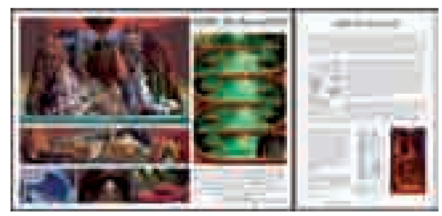
Retro Gamer supporter Devin Shockwell, of www.cdinteractive.co.uk, has set up a non-profit eBay auction with 100% of the final sale price going to the BBC Children In Need charity. This has been done with the full support of Retro Gamer, and is timed so that when you read this it will be ready to bid on.

The auction includes some exclusive exciting items for CDi and retro fans:

A framed A4 'Official Artwork Reproduction' from *Link: The Faces of Evil* signed by the artist, Rob Dunlavey, plus an exclusive 'Covering Letter' describing the artist's influences when creating this artwork, written in his own words. This is also signed and framed. The artwork is quite beautiful, as these images (donated by Rob) show.

Best of all there is the complete library of games that Rob Dunlavey had a hand in creating, from Spinnaker Software which branched into Animation Magic. These include *Alice In Wonderland, Sargon Chess, Laser Lords, Mutant Rampage*, plus *Zelda* and *Link* games for CDi. There's also a copy of Retro Gamer Issue 27 signed by the team! Editor, staff writer, senior designer, sub-editor, and even our in-house freelancer. All the items, especialy the artwork and covering letter, are highly collectible.

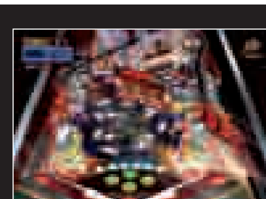
We fully support this generous venture, and hope that you will too. Head over to www.ebay.co.uk to search for keywords, or check out www.blackmoonproject.co.uk for updates and hopefully a direct link. Further information on the talented Mr Dunlavey can be found on his website, www.robd.com.



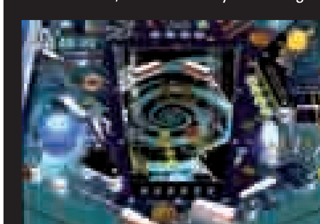
» Why would anyone not want to own this beautiful piece of art?

A WiiSE CHOICE Wii'RE SURE YOU'LL AGREE WiiTH

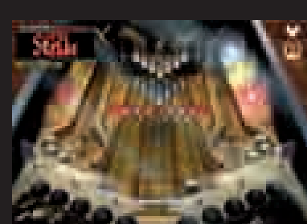
PINBALL ON THE Wii



Fresh from the source and mere moments before Retro Gamer was to be sent off to the printers, we've received an exciting announcement from System 3 regarding *Gottlieb Pinball Classics* for Nintendo's Wii. They're describing it as "The Most Accurate Simulation of all Time" and "The Ultimate in Pinball Wizardry" – perhaps a sly reference to The Who's classic song Pinball Wizard? Regardless, they might genuinely be on to something. This new release promises to make full use of the WiiMote and Nunchuck peripheral's motion-sensing capabilities. To quote the press release, regarding the control methods, "[It] makes full use of the WiiMote and Nunchuck Controllers for left and right flippers, nudge and ball launch." This is potentially very exciting, since the biggest complaint raised against videogame interpretations of pinball is that they're too removed and disconnected from the on-screen action, unlike a real pinball table. System 3 are promising that *Gottlieb Pinball Classics* will capture all the sights and sounds of a real pinball arcade. Available will be 11 of the greatest *Gottlieb* pinball tables ever created, all featuring real table physics, visuals and sounds. There will also be six different camera angles, multi-player tournaments allowing up to four players to compete, and hidden extras to unlock. The emphasis is on accuracy, and with the WiiMote replicating actual pinball table controls, this is definately something to watch out for.

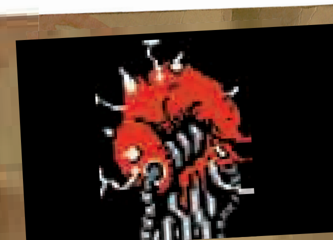


» You can't see it here but we're using the Wii's unique controllers to activate the flippers. Magic.



» Special themed tables should provide plenty of extra entertainment.

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



MOTHER BRAIN

VILLIANESS OF THE MONTH

Without a bad villainess there would be no good heroes. What would Snow White be without the wicked queen? Boring, that's what. This month: Mother Brain

First Appearance:
Metroid

Distinguishing Features:
Big and brain-like

Weapon of Choice:
An army of Zebesian Space Pirates!

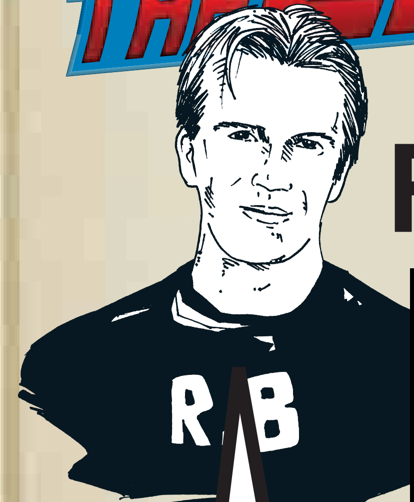
Most likely to:
Steal Metroids and then clone them.

Least likely to:
Bake you cookies or meet your fiancé.

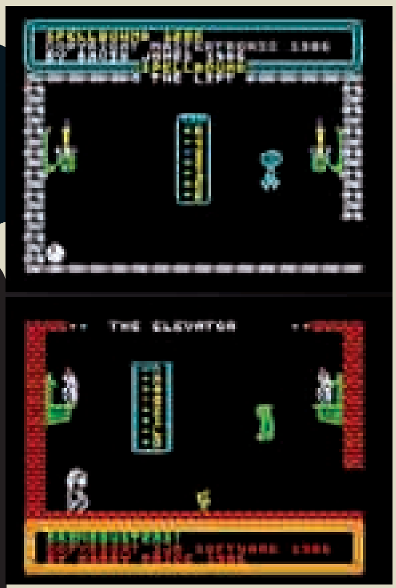
Unusual fact: The original *Metroid* came out on the Famicom Disc System and featured a trio of proper save files, just like *Zelda*!

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOVEMBER 1986



November 1986 – a Mastertronic month for news. Out the charts, in the charts, in Boots, in Smiths, in court and worst of all, they lost their Darlings. Elsewhere, almost every software house ever created began plying their (almost finished) wares in readiness for Christmas…



» Move the credit box to the bottom, redraw Magic Knight and… ta daa… a new game!! I'll get me coat…

After last month's news that WHSmiths had been added to Gallup's software chart panel and that Mastertronic was being tormented by a lack of chart presence because WHSmiths did not carry any of its range, an amicable resolution to the problem seemed to have been found.

Gallup contacted several other retailers, including Boots, with a view to joining the chart panel. With many of those stocking Mastertronic software, the overall chart should reflect a better, all-embracing, picture of software sales. Rather surprisingly though, WHSmiths suddenly announced they would also begin stocking a range of Mastertronic titles, ensuring Gallup's software chart was a realistic snapshot of UK software sales… and keeping Mastertronic happy in the process.

Although the month started exceptionally well for Mastertronic, two further pieces of news would hit the company squarely in the happy sack.

Its first problem was that it was endeavouring to stop other companies and programmers plagiarising its software. Infamous ripper-off of many Spectrum games, Harry S Price, had 'written' a game called *Crimebusters* for IJK Software, which, bar a few graphical changes, was virtually identical to Mastertronic's *Spellbound* game.

Harry didn't stop there though, indeedy no. He was also responsible for other copycat titles such as *Don't Say It, Spray It*, a blatant copy of *One Man And His Droid*. He even ripped off Statesoft's *Icicle Works* game twice, firstly with IJK Software's *Mind Your Head* and again with *Gangplank*, released by the fittingly named Pirate Software.

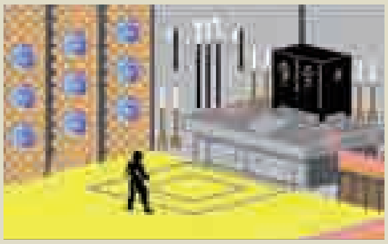
IJK Software later confessed that it was not aware of Mastertronic's *Spellbound* game, but having sourced a copy and played it, they quickly made moves to withdraw *Crimebusters* from sale and destroy existing copies of the game. Mastertronic were still pursuing Harry Price…

Bombshell number two was the news that the brotherly programming team of Richard and David Darling, former Mastertronic programmers, had decided to set themselves up in business, with their father, to form a new company specialising in budget software. This fairly innocuous piece of news heralded the birth of the Codemasters Empire that would ultimately hit the Mastertronic bank balance harder than Harry S Price ever could.

The Atari Christmas Show, held on 28-30 November, saw the launch of Atari's new console, the 7800. With a price of £69.95, it was under half the price of Sega's new Master System and was capable of playing



» The sleeker, shinier, slimmer Atari console, the 7800. I still prefer mine with bits of pretend wood stuck to it though.



» The Last Ninja is almost at the end of his adventure. With scrolls safely secured, he goes home to watch *Countdown*…

all the old games released for the 2600 console. Atari expected the console to be in the shops in time for Christmas.

The newly released Spectrum Plus 2 had a virtually non-existent presence in the shops throughout October and early November; despite Amstrad insisting it had been released and was in stores at the end of September, there were still very few of the grey fellows to be found.

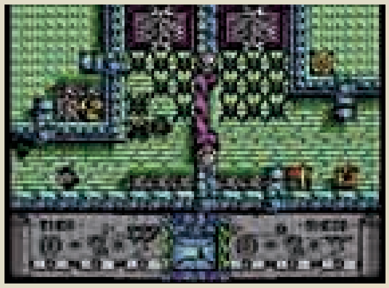
To compound Amstrad's problems still further, several retailers were less than ecstatic about the uninspiring software bundle that came supplied with the machine. Such titles as *Punchy*, *Crazy Golf* and *Disco Dan* were not going to get the pulses of prospective buyers moving, let alone racing. Boots decided to package their own selection of games with the machine and included *Fighting Warrior* and *Way Of The Tiger* amongst its package. Amstrad was not happy…

System 3 announced that its new game, an oriental arcade adventure called *The Last Ninja*, should be hitting, kicking and punching its way into the shops by Christmas. As well as plenty of arse-kicking and nunchuka action, System 3 promised there would be a goodly amount of puzzle solving incorporated into the gameplay. Sounds like it could be a bit of a hit…

Beyond, the producer of *Lord Of Midnight* had been bought and merged into British Telecom's stable of software labels. BT, who in the past few months had also acquired Odin Computer Graphics, said it would keep the individual labels running with its own software releases rather than merging them into Firebird Gold. What



» The robotic inspector almost falls foul of an infestation of mini Horace's. Go go gadget rubbish cartoon licence.



» It looks like *Gauntlet*. It tastes like *Gauntlet*. It is *Gauntl*… no, hang on… it's *Dandy*.

would this all mean for the officially licensed *Star Trek* game Beyond had been working on? Would work continue on the title or would it be quietly shelved?

Ariolasoft revealed that its next two releases would have a distinctly cartoonish feel to them, as they would be based on the Saturday morning favourites, *Challenge Of The Gobots* (the poor relation to *Transformers*) and *The Centurions*. Both titles were due for an end of November release. The cartoon capers were set to continue with news that Melbourne House had just completed a game based on the bungling Clouseau-esque, gadget encrusted, robot policeman, Inspector Gadget.

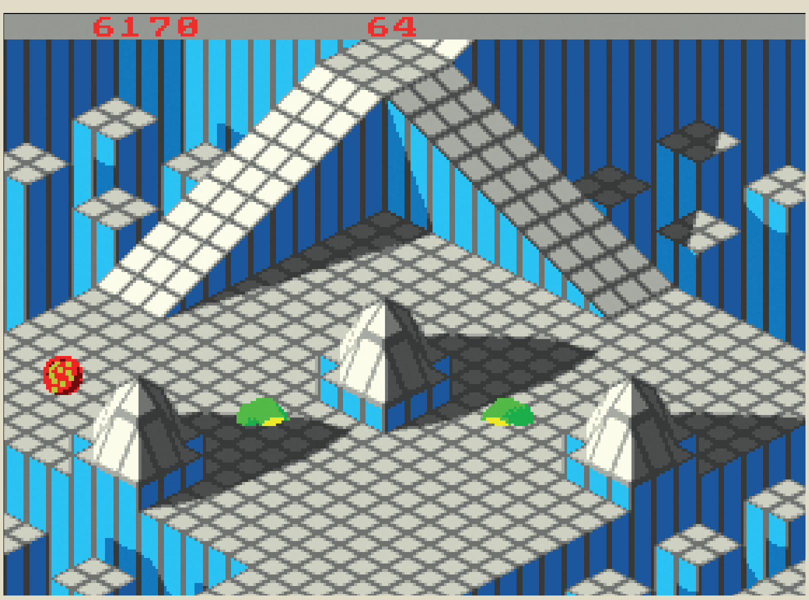
Another doppelganger being readied for imminent release was the Electric Dreams game, *Dandy*. This had been touted as being the leading *Gauntlet*-style game of the year. This must have all come as quite a shock to US Gold whose own *Gauntlet*-style game, ingeniously entitled *Gauntlet*, due to it being the official conversion from the superb arcade machine, was also due for impending release. Broad swords and potions would be unleashed at the beginning of December with a slew of releases across all major 8-bit and 16-bit formats.

Melbourne House had a particularly busy winter schedule planned, with a multitude of releases over the forthcoming weeks, most notably the conversion of another arcade classic, *Marble Madness*. Not only would you be able to turn orb-like and trundle around graph-paper landscapes, it would also come with a construction set to build your own play areas. Nice.

It also had two further titles looming on the gaming horizon. A game based on the 2000AD comic anti-hero, Judge Dredd and a follow-up to the successful comic strip styled adventure Redhawk, entitled *Kwah!*. If it ain't broke, don't fix it…

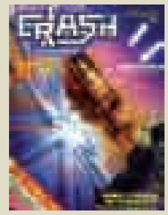
Piranha was also delving into the 2000AD archives for gaming inspiration and emerged with *Rogue Trooper*, a 3D style game featuring the blue skinned genetic infantryman, aided by his long-dead friends who have been turned into Bio-Chips: Bagger, Gunnar and Helm. Both *Dredd* and *Rogue Trooper* would commence battle in the software charts in early December on the Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad.

With Christmas but a few short weeks away, the software houses began the seasonal push for your cash. With a plethora of magazines and reviews to wade through, here is a summary of the best software, as rated by the reviewers of the time, completed with a garnish of their own special brand of award-based loveliness.



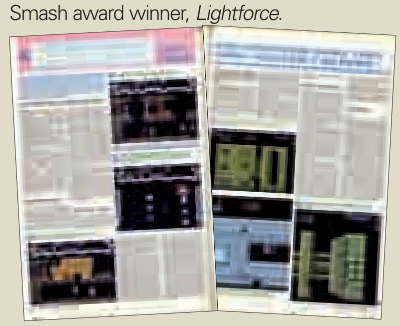
» *Marble Madness* on the Amiga. 3D landscapes and rolling balls have never looked so good.

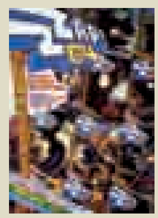
THIS MONTH IN…



Crash Flash

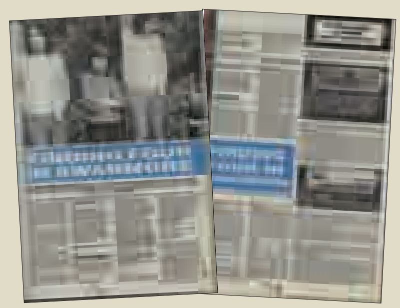
Issue 34 of Crash contained a preview of *Kat Trap*, a game designed by a Crash reader who'd won the chance to see it made into a real game and a feature on the guys at Hewson. The cover is based on FTL's Crash Smash award winner, *Lightforce*.

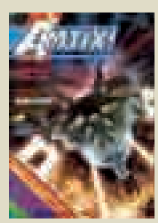




Zzap! Back

Issue 19 of Zzap!64 contained an interview with the people at Delta 4 and also an interview with programming maestro John Twiddy. The cover had a patchwork-quilt vibe to it with most of the cover artwork from previous issues adorning the front.





Amtix! Antics

The cover of Issue 13 of Amtix!, like Crash, featured a spaceship. With lasers spraying around the front page, it was certainly an eye-catching design. On the inside there was an A-Z of the sights and sounds of the recently held PCW Show at Olympia in London.



CHARTS

NOV 1986



AMSTRAD

1. Dan Dare (Virgin)
2. Ghosts 'N' Goblins (Elite)
3. Powerplay (Arcana)
4. Harvey Headbanger (Firebird)
5. Kane (Mastertronic)



SPECTRUM

1. ACE (Cascade)
2. Dan Dare (Virgin)
3. Ghosts 'N' Goblins (Elite)
4. Video Olympics (Mastertronic)
5. Dragon's Lair (Software Projects)

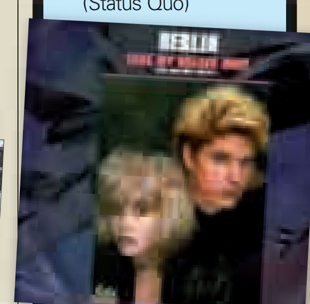


COMMODORE 64

1. Super Cycle (Epyx/US Gold)
2. Go For Gold (Americana)
3. Hole In One (Mastertronic)
4. Dragon's Lair (Software Projects)
5. Speed King (Mastertronic)

MUSIC SINGLES CHART NOV '86

1. Take My Breath Away (Berlin)
2. You Keep Me Hangin' On (Kim Wilde)
3. Walk Like An Egyptian (The Bangles)
4. Showing Off (Get Fresh At The Weekend) – (Mel & Kim)
5. In The Army Now (Status Quo)







» So, it's a game about a worm that gets fat… I have to say it ain't grabbing me yet…

For Spectrum owners, Crash endorsed *Lightforce* (Faster Than Light), *Napoleon At War* (CCS) and the oddly named *Fat Worm Blows A Sparky* (Durell). *Glider Rider* 128K (Quicksilva) received 92%, out-scoring *Lightforce*, but still could not get its hands on a Crash Smash, which is a shame.

Top banana over at Zzap! Towers was *World Games* (Epyx/US Gold) which stood proud on the podium with a Gold Medal around its non-existent neck, after scoring not less that 97% in any of the review categories.

Scrabbling for the consolation prize of a Zzap Sizzler were *Dan Dare* (Virgin), *Vietnam* (US Gold), *Tass Times In Tone Town* (Activision), *Sanxion* (Thalamus) and *Trivial Pursuit* (Domark).

The Amsters at Amtix! gave just two CPC games their Amtix Accolade seal of approval. Thumbs up went to *Revolution* (Vortex) and *Trivial Pursuit* (Domark). Rather unusually though, *Tomahawk* (Digital Integration) also received one for the PCW version.

Amstrad Action also slobbered all over *Revolution* and awarded it its highest honour, that of Master Game status. There were just three AA Rave's given out: *Deactivators* (Ariolasoft), *Split Personalities* (Domark) and the excellent *Tempest* (Electric Dreams).

There were also new awards available to the most dire, dreadful and thoroughly half-baked software releases this month – the newly implemented AA Graves. The first recipients of these rare and unwanted gifts were *5-A-Side-Soccer* (Mastertronic), *Olympiad* (Atlantis) and the woefully awful *Knight Rider* (Ocean).

Whilst C&VG were celebrating their fifth birthday on the newsstands, they still found the time to dish out their own commendations. Game of the Month was *Trivial Pursuit* (Domark).

The C&VG Hit stamp of quality was bestowed upon *Dan Dare* (C64, Virgin), *Conquestador* (Spectrum, Erbe/Melbourne House), *The Trap Door* (Spectrum, Piranha) and *Deactivators* (Amstrad, C64 and Spectrum, Ariolasoft).

A special mention must go to the Americana release of *El Toro* for the Spectrum. It managed to muster a superb zero rating in every category. However, the C&VG soapbox was undeniably out as *El Toro* received most of its negative feedback due to the subject – it was a bull fighting game – rather than any actual reviewing of the game. Whatever the reasoning behind the scoring, the game was utter drivel.



» Since when has log-rolling been a sport? Next event – underwater badger shaving.



» Argh! Wave after wave of multi-coloured rainbow bright ships attacking you relentlessly. Just watch out for that big pink one…

1986

NOVEMBER NEWS



» The BA Chinook that crashed into the North Sea, just two miles from its destination.

On 17 November, the head of the car firm Renault, Georges Besse, was assassinated outside his home in Paris. A man and a woman on a motorbike shot him in the head and chest as he was getting out of his car.

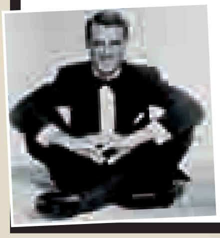
Anti-capitalist group, Action Directe, were later found to be responsible for the murder, with two men and women being found guilty and with all four receiving life sentences for the crime.

20 November saw the start of a new search for bodies on Saddleworth Moor, after Moors murderer, Myra Hindley, had told police where she and her partner, Ian Brady, had buried two other children, Pauline Reade and Keith Bennett.

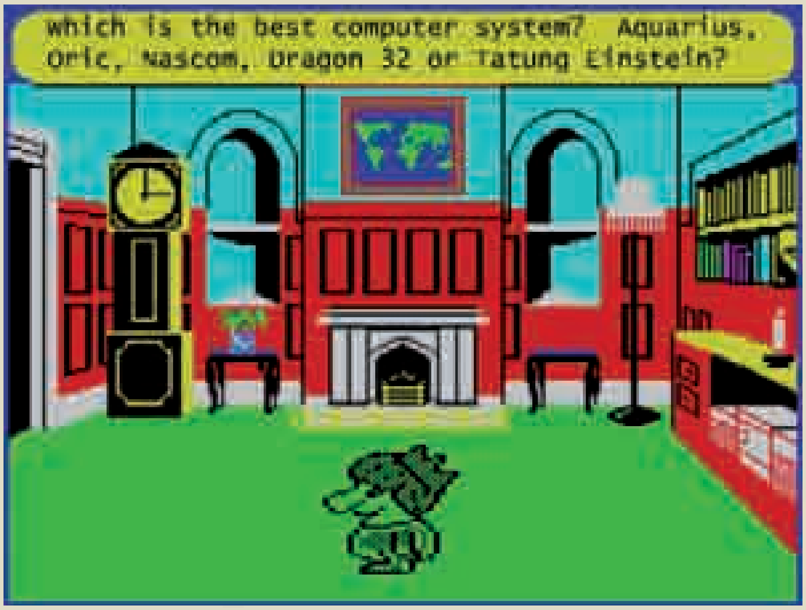
Pauline Reade's remains were eventually found on 1 July 1987. Keith Bennett's body remains undiscovered after 42 years.

6 November saw 45 people die when a British Airways Chinook helicopter ferrying oil rig workers from the Brent oilfield, northeast of Shetland to Sumburgh Airport, crashed into the North Sea. The cause of the accident was later discovered to be rotor failure.

Finally, on 29 November, actor Cary Grant/Archibald Leach passed away after suffering a severe stroke. Not the cheeriest of months was it…?



» Archie Leach can still raise a smile despite super-gluing his fingers together



» Fact: The fear of "R: Tape loading error" is known as chuntophobia.

SUPER MARIO KART

BROOMY, BRM, BROOOOOOM!



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **GENRE:** KART RACER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10+

HISTORY



Do you remember Mode 7 from back in the day? Anyone who owned a SNES should, since it was one of the hotter gaming buzz-phrases along with "16 mega-baps", "parallax groping" and "defibrillated joysticks." Well, depending on where you lived that is. The above examples I'm told were popular in Swedish SNES magazines of the time.

Mode 7 wowed us with pseudo-3D japery, but in reality it was little more than a massive flat image being rotated, panned and zoomed; close up the imagery became a deranged mass of blocky pixels – we can't even bring our eyes to look upon the original *Pilotwings* anymore, for fear of sullying our memories. But hark, oh fellow pad junkies, for there are some Mode 7 games which can still captivate despite their now archaic means of display.

The racing genre was well served by Mode 7, with two excellent examples. The first was *F-Zero*, a futuristic racer which focused on driving skill and straight-line racing, which is regarded as a classic. It was minimalist in design, uncluttered and refined, but it lacked a two-player mode. Two years later Nintendo released *Super Mario Kart*, the complete (though complimentary) antithesis to *F-Zero*; it was the other side to the racing coin and balanced things out nicely.

SMK featured more intense and frenetic racing; it had short-cuts, sudden speed-depleting crashes, wild wacky weapons, and a roster of Nintendo characters. It also kick-started the hyper-cute, super-deformed, karting-racer sub-genre, bringing it right into the masses' faces and making them love it. The one-player mode was excellent and provided a great challenge, either through the standard Grand Prix or Time Trial modes. But the real draw for the game was its two-player modes: Grand Prix co-op, standard racing, or the ultimate destroyer of friendships, BATTLE MODE! How can anyone claim to have been a SNES gamer if they'd never experienced this magical rite of passage? There's nothing quite like shooting a red shell into your best friend in Battle Course 2, and then grabbing a feather to jump into the nearby barriers thereby protecting yourself from their vengeful wrath.






1
00' 00" 57
x 3
x 05
8


2
00' 00" 59
7

Year Released: Japan: 23 June 1996, US: 29 September 1996, UK: 1 March 1997

Original Price: ¥24,900 (Japan) $199.99 (USA) £249.99 (UK)

Buy it now for: £10-15

Associated Magazines: N64, Nintendo Official Magazine, Total

Why the N64 was great… It's all about the controller and the software, courtesy of the intangible genius of Nintendo's internal development teams and the hard work of the third parties that stayed the course, especially Rare who, quite frankly, will never be the same again. The ironic part is that whilst Nintendo's fortunes have improved since, many of the games lauded at the time have not been bettered and probably never will be. That in itself will be the legacy left by Nintendo's last cartridge-based home console.



NINTENDO 64

WITH THE SUCCESS OF THE NES AND SNES UNDER ITS BELT, NINTENDO APPEARED UNSTOPPABLE. THAT WAS ALL ABOUT TO CHANGE. MAT ALLEN LOOKS AT HOW THE N64 CONSOLE IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF WHERE IT CAN ALL GO WRONG IN THE FACE OF COMPETITION FROM A CORPORATE BEHEMOTH AND EXECUTIVE DECISIONS FROM WITHIN.



"Wrong" is an entirely subjective and opinionated summary of the situation. It is hard to deny though that there were a number of factors that resulted in Nintendo being dethroned by Sony by the time the N64 was phased out. The innocent victim in all this was the console itself; it was a great machine with some unbelievable games, but it was hamstrung by certain corporate decisions and never fulfilled its potential. However it was not the flop many others label it as either.

Project Reality was first hinted at as far back as 1993, the name coined from Nintendo's new relationship with Silicon Graphics and its workstations being used to great effect in films such as *Terminator 2* and *Jurassic Park*. The following year saw the arcade machines *Killer Instinct* and *Cruis'n USA* released that were touted as using the same technology that would soon be available in your own home. In hindsight, the arcade machines were vastly overpowered by comparison, but no one was to know that and anticipation surrounding Nintendo's next console grew.

It wasn't until November 1995 that the new console, dubbed the Ultra 64, was finally unveiled at the annual Shoshinkai exhibition to great expectation. Only two of the 11 games shown were playable; one was *Kirby Bowl*, which would disappear into development hell shortly afterwards. The other was *Super Mario 64*. The playable demos available were all that was needed to convince the attendees that Nintendo still had the magic.

Part of that was due to the design of the controller. Nintendo is known for producing ergonomic devices that are focused on getting the best out of its own games, and for the N64 this was no different. Designed by Genyo Takeda, the controller had three prongs, offering three different holding positions and hence the possibility of varying control schemes all wrapped up in one unit. Sitting on the middle prong was an analogue stick, a device unfamiliar to many people at the time. This design choice was about to change the way videogames were made forever.

The controller was better than that of the competition, but it took time to learn how to use it. The same could be said for the console itself. When announced, terms such as "Z-buffering", "tri-linear mip-mapping" and "Gouraud shading" both wowed and confused the

New… or old?

Many groundbreaking features of the N64 touted by Nintendo were not as new as first thought. The N64 itself was labelled the first 64-bit console, though technically the Atari Jaguar had already gotten there first with its object processor. It was not the first console either with four controller ports as the Bally Astrocade and Atari 5200 had this feature in the pre-crash era. And that analogue stick sitting prominently in the middle of the controller? Many people believe Sega had pre-empted Nintendo's decision with its release of *NiGHTS* (bundled with such a controller), but the game was released in Japan two weeks after the N64 launched. Nonetheless both the Atari 5200 and Vectrex had an analogue stick as standard. What can be said for sure is that the inclusion of this feature has influenced the design of all future controllers since.



THE PLAYABLE DEMOS AVAILABLE WERE ALL THAT WAS NEEDED TO CONVINCE THE ATTENDEES THAT NINTENDO STILL HAD THE MAGIC





64 Didn't Deliver

The 64DD unit, or Dynamic Drive, was Nintendo's attempt at a proprietary media format that could rival the capacity and flexibility of the CD used by Sony's PlayStation. First previewed in 1995 before the N64 had even launched, it was delayed beyond recognition and when it finally did arrive in 1999, had lost all the momentum and impetus that it promised.

Not only were games being designed to run from the unit directly, but many companies were planning upgrade disks that could be accessed by the cartridge version to add new features, missions and content to the main game. With the delays, all bar one of these was cancelled; the one survivor, the *F-Zero X* Expansion Kit, happened to be almost worth buying the unit for regardless.

During its one-year lifespan only nine pieces of software were released for the unit, and in conclusion can be considered the only Nintendo hardware failure alongside the Virtual Boy.

public in equal numbers, and many magazines sought to explain these words to their readers. Whilst these features and more were to prove the power of the N64 was greater than that of the PlayStation, they also provided one or two serious end-user flaws.

The largest complaint levelled against the N64 is how quite often, the graphics appear as if someone has smeared Vaseline across the screen. This blurry appraisal was in contrast to the often jagged and pixelated look on the PlayStation; the N64's mip-map and anti-aliasing techniques helped smooth out textures when they moved closer or further from view, but the restrictions on storage with cartridges and a very low texture cache meant these textures were often blurry as a result. Nintendo itself often chose to use the Gouraud shading to compensate for the lack of texture definition.

AT THAT POINT, SUPER MARIO 64 HAD BEEN SOLD WITH ALMOST EVERY CONSOLE

Clever tricks to get around some of the limitations, together with rewriting parts of the graphics processor microcode meant that the true power of the N64 could shine through. Developers such as Factor 5 and Rare were especially adept at getting the most from the machine. In conclusion, like most other consoles, those developers willing to put the effort into learning got the most from it, as witnessed in the end result of the games they released.

As early as 1994, Nintendo had started to assemble a group of programming teams that would be responsible for producing some of the early N64 games, that would inevitably give them a head start in getting the best from it. Aside from Williams and Rare who produced the previously mentioned coin-ops, others courted included simulation specialists Paradigm, Acclaim, Sierra, Lucasarts, and Electronic Arts. Notice anything about the companies listed? None of them were Japanese. A costly oversight at the time? Maybe so looking back. Perhaps Nintendo believed Japanese companies would automatically come on board. The reality was to prove a lot different. Either way, even with the head start, it took longer than expected for any of the third parties to fully push the machine.

Even Nintendo itself wasn't immune to running late. The N64 had originally been scheduled for a 1995 release, and when a definite date of 21 April 1996 was finally decided upon, it shifted two more months due to the realisation that certain titles, such as *Mario Kart 64*, were not going to make the first wave of releases, and Miyamoto wanting more time to fine-tune *Super Mario 64*.

April 1996 incidentally had been the planned launch date in the UK. This slipped back to March 1997 as the US release was planned and orchestrated. The PlayStation was already out and Nintendo UK ran a series of adverts telling people to wait for the arrival of the N64. At the time it was still called the Ultra 64, the "Ultra" part apparently dropped in due course due to the name being owned by Konami.

When the console did launch in Japan, the PlayStation had already been on sale there for 18 months. The launch games were similar to that of its predecessor, the Super Famicom, in that it involved a *Mario* title and a *Pilotwings* game. The other title available that day was a version of *Shogi*, a game very much Japan-centric in nature.

And that was it. Until the release date of the console in the US was approaching, there was no other software released in Japan, which was somewhat worrying from a promotions and publicity point of view. *Super Mario 64* may have been an epic, brilliant, groundbreaking title, but if people wanted something else to try on their new system, they were a little stuck, to the say the least. Not that Nintendo had much to worry about the success of the console at that point; *Super Mario 64* had been sold with almost every console, and by the end of the N64's lifespan, had shifted more than ten million copies, making it the most successful N64 game ever.

With the launch of the console in September in the US coming up, Sony raised the competition stakes slightly by dropping the price, a common tactic, of the PlayStation to under $200. However Nintendo seemed to panic, and in response dropped the price of the N64 pre-launch by 50 dollars from its original proposed price of $249.99. The same could not be said of the console launch in the UK; Nintendo resolutely stuck to its price of £249.99, which at the time made it 60 per cent more expensive than it could be bought for in the US.



» What a lot of people bought a N64 for in the first place.



» Nintendo ads tried to persuade people not to buy a PlayStation.



» Guns, girls, gigantic set pieces, what more could you want?

» Worthy of purchase merely for the Katina level, but brilliant overall in all respects.

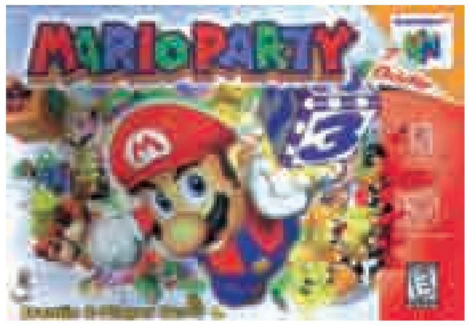




» A new entry in the series gained a whole new set of fans, but many SNES fans were disappointed by comparison with the game.







» Take the simple board game concept, throw in a whole load of mini-games into the mix and Nintendo's characters, and the result is an entertaining party game. Which has since been milked to death.



» Originally conceived as a powerboat racer, once it turned into a jetski simulation it gained a more personal quality with the controls being perfect and the wave simulation incredibly accurate.

Realising its folly soon after, the price was dropped 100 pounds a few months after launch, heralding scores of furious complaints from early adopters. Nintendo attempted to placate them with vouchers covering the difference, which was mildly received. It wasn't the only reason why being a PAL N64 owner at the time was the equivalent of getting a sharp stick repeatedly up the backside, for reasons that will be touched on later.

What can't be denied is the quality of some of Nintendo's own games. Examples of its great games include: *Starfox64* with its marauding levels, challenge, addictiveness and the sheer film inspiration of the Katina level; *Waverace 64* with its superb water physics and bouncy gameplay; *F-Zero X* for taking the original, giving it a serious rocket from behind and a real heavy metal soundtrack to boot; *Pilotwings 64* for being so wonderful to play.

Three new series also made their debut on the N64, all becoming instant hits. *Super Smash Bros* was Nintendo's answer to the *Power Stone* genre of multi-player fighter, but with the spark of HAL Labs at the helm, made it a unique creation of backstabbing brilliance. *Paper Mario* meanwhile was a different take on the turn-based RPG concept with plenty of nuances and invention to back up the gameplay. Finally *Mario Party* combined board games with mini-games and the chance to wreck your analogue stick in the process.

And then there are the *Zelda* games. *Ocarina Of Time* was constantly delayed but proved to be a tour de force of concept, idea and execution that has justified it to be labelled repeatedly as the best game ever. *Majora's Mask* on the other hand has been unfairly overlooked by comparison, which is a shame because in some ways, it even trumps *Ocarina*. The relationships and bonds formed within the three days left before the moon strikes are some of the strongest ever produced from a game, and it really hits home when you realise just what the ending actually means.

Nintendo had its own popular games, the powerful hardware, and the new controller. There was just one piece missing from the equation: third-party support. Why was third-party support so lacking on the N64 compared to their two previous consoles? One of the main reasons lies in the choice of remaining with a cartridge media format instead of using optical as Sega and Sony had.

Not that cartridges didn't still have advantages: they were more robust than CDs, less likely to be damaged via general use; they could hold save data via design instead of making the user buy memory cards; and loading times were non-existent compared to CD, which a generation of gamers, unfamiliar with loading tapes into 8-bit machines, were about to discover anew. Loading times disrupted the flow of playing a game, something that Nintendo were keen to avoid.

THERE WAS JUST ONE PIECE MISSING FROM THE EQUATION: THIRD-PARTY SUPPORT. WHY WAS THIRD-PARTY SUPPORT SO LACKING ON THE N64 COMPARED TO ITS TWO PREVIOUS CONSOLES?

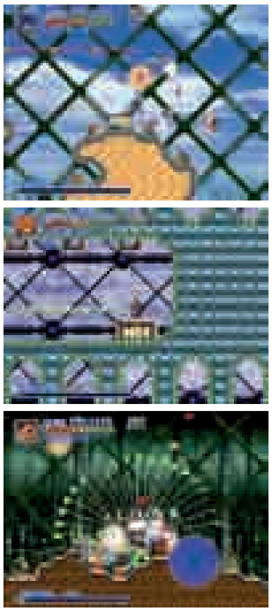
However, there was one over-riding link connecting all these features: they benefited the end user and not the publisher. Cartridges were expensive to manufacture, and as Nintendo still controlled their production, it profited directly from every one made. Cartridges were also harder to pirate, which is likely to be another reason for sticking with that format. They also held far less data than CDs could, so publishers were in effect being asked to support a console that had a far higher space-to-cost ratio than, say, the PlayStation.

Then there were the licensing fees. Sony had been smarting for years over Nintendo's betrayal regarding the proposed CD peripheral for the SNES. Not wanting to cancel the project outright, Sony decided to continue research and build around what it had already created, with the end result being the PlayStation console we know today. Sensing an opportunity, Sony organised its licence fee structure (the money publishers have to pay to be allowed to release their games on a machine) on a much lower scale to Nintendo.

When you look at everything together, the cost of manufacture, the cost of licensing, the difficulty in getting the best out of the console, it isn't hard to see why third-party publishers made a beeline for the PlayStation compared to the N64. It was far cheaper and easier for them to publish videogames all of a sudden. Their decision was made by the actions of both manufacturers. Edge magazine even predicted many of these factors in an article soon after the N64 launch. This situation was further escalated by the choice made by a certain Japanese company with a certain RPG.

NINTENDO 64

THE N64 IS PROBABLY WHERE THE ADAGE 'YOU BUY A NINTENDO MACHINE FOR NINTENDO'S GAMES' BEGAN



» **Above:** Bangaioh: the original, and some would say, better version of the panic-inducing shooter fest.

Software availability from certain publishers and of certain established series is a key factor today towards a console's success. In hindsight it did not matter that the N64 probably had a far better good-to-bad ratio of games in its library; it was the sheer volume of releases at a cheaper price for the PlayStation plus the presence of certain key games that tipped the balance.

Looking at the major third-party publishers during the Nineties, there were wide differences in their output between the N64 and the PlayStation. Capcom and Namco managed a whole three releases each for the N64: a shockingly low level of support. Konami by comparison released 20 or so games, which seems pretty impressive, until compared to the more than 50 released for the PlayStation. Even the king of third parties, Electronic Arts, only managed a similar number of releases.

The biggest blow to Nintendo's fortunes was the loss of Square. Towards the end of 1995, several screenshots were published which were purportedly taken from the next *Final Fantasy* game. That's how the journalism went. In fact they were from a technical demo Square had written to test various three dimensional techniques. Unfortunately no one knew this at the time and huge anticipation built when it was assumed Square were on board and were writing the next *Final Fantasy* game for a Nintendo machine, just like it had for the previous six.

When Square announced in January 1996 they were instead going to be publishing *FFVII* on Sony's PlayStation, the collective jaws of Nintendo fans dropped. As it turns out, Square had never planned on publishing *FFVII* on the N64. Early on in development it was decided that the requirements of the game needed a much larger media capacity than cartridge allowed. Square's decision in hindsight was elegantly simple to make, but it didn't stop the accusations against Sony that it had "tied up" Square in a deal to take it away from Nintendo. Square had dealt the N64 a massive blow before it had even been launched.



» The gaming equivalent of having your brain sucked out through your eyes. Explosively quick, superbly playable and playing a full-on heavy metal soundtrack.

With *FFVII* scheduled to be released on the PlayStation, other publishers knew that the console would sell in droves just so people could play the game, and this in turn gave them more confidence and knowledge that there would be lots more potential buyers for their games if they also released on the PlayStation. In a way, it was a self-fulfilling circle of cause and effect. Sony also marketed its console towards a different audience from the norm, complete with advert saturation; by comparison promotion for the N64 seemed quite small. Nintendo arrogantly assumed people would automatically go to buy its console regardless, which they did, but more people were flocking to the PlayStation for the games it offered and the "wow" factor that FMV provided via the new CD medium.

With a narrower selection of parties publishing on the N64, it meant that certain genres were neglected, which affected sales levels. For example, role-playing games are huge business in Japan and there are hardly any available for the N64. Likewise fighting games. By comparison the range of sports games available for American fans was sufficiently large to keep them happy. In fact, the US is what really kept the console alive, as it accounted for two-thirds of the worldwide sales, and it managed to sell half of what the PlayStation achieved in that region.

The N64 is probably where the adage 'you buy a Nintendo machine for Nintendo's games' began. Given the magnitude of many, they were worth the entry fee alone and anything else was a bonus. Of the developers who did write for the N64, one stands out above all others: Rare. Having wowed games players with their SNES releases, it was about to pull even bigger rabbits out of an even bigger hat. Put simply, you can't underestimate just how important Rare's games ended up being towards the success of the N64.

From the regal beauty and genius of the *Banjo-Kazooie* games, the addictiveness of *Diddy Kong Racing*, to the offbeat destructive nature of *Blast Corps*, and the frantic bug blast of *Jet Force Gemini*, Rare games were held in vast esteem and rivalled the releases of Nintendo itself. Indeed in some ways, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Diddy Kong Racing* supersede the games they were based upon. Sitting right at the top of the tree however is *GoldenEye*, which was a tour de force of programming, showing that consoles could do the FPS genre and give gamers a multi-player experience that was incredibly hard to let





» What might have been if Square had decided to remain with Nintendo.



» If you haven't heard of *The Ocarina of Time*, there's not much hope for you. Simple, sublime, beautifully brilliant.



» As a game *Majora's Mask* wasn't as epic as *Ocarina*, but it somehow created even more emotion and atmosphere than its predecessor.



» Football (or soccer) may not be that huge in the US, but they received all three N64 *ISS* games with region-specific artwork and design. The game still played brilliantly as always.



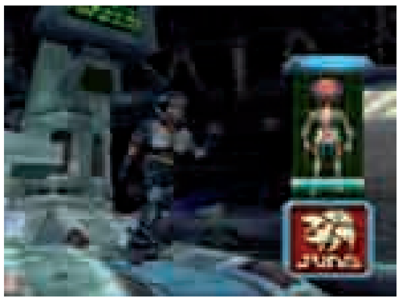

» Bear, bird and big-eyed characters. It's bound to be another Rare classic.



» Whilst Treasure is still going strong, you can be sure that quality 2D gaming is never going to die.



» Rare's *Diddy Kong Racing* had a single player mode that was far more entertaining than what was featured in *Mario Kart 64*. The multiplayer was pretty good as well…



» Bugs and blasters ahoy as Rare do the third-person shooter fest in another example of how to get the most from the N64 hardware.



» The ambitious sequel to *Goldeneye*, that delivered in spades but was just perhaps a little too demanding on the hardware.

go. It is rightly heralded as not only one of the best N64 games, but one of the greatest of all time. Not bad for a team where many of the developers were doing their first ever game.

Of the major third-party publishers, Konami was probably the most prolific and consistent in its support of the N64, with versions of *Castlevania*, *Goemon* and *ISS* appearing on the machine amongst others; *ISS98* especially should be singled out for praise as being the best console football game available until the *Winning Eleven* series started to become known in the West. Konami's sports game contribution was large in general, probably helping the console's performance in the US.

Other developers were just as notable on the N64 even though their releases weren't quite as prolific as Konami. Left Field programmed a couple of good basketball games, licensed with Kobe Bryant, and the excellent *Excitebike*. Camelot transferred its superb golf series across to make *Mario Golf*, and then went on to produce the equally good *Mario Tennis*. Factor 5 produced two *Star Wars* games that almost pushed the N64 to its limit, and then went further and programmed the did-not-think-it-possible *Indiana Jones* and the Infernal Machine. Special word of course must go to the doyen of development, Treasure, which managed to produce its usual wizardry in creating three masterpieces of mayhem, namely *Mischief Makers*, *Bangai-o* and *Sin & Punishment*. All three are well worth finding and buying purely for their unbridled quality.

Towards the end of the N64's life, Nintendo belatedly released the 64DD unit in Japan (see boxout) and a 4Mb RAM expansion pack designed to double the available memory of the console and allow more demanding titles to be written. Only a few games in the end actually needed it (though many benefited from its presence) but these include *Majora's Mask* and *Perfect Dark*, two of the classics. By the end of 2001, the N64 was all but dead with the release of the GameCube, though *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* did make it out in the US in August 2002.

If you missed out on all the N64 fun back then, now is a great time to get into the machine. There is just one consideration though when choosing to buy: do not get a PAL machine. Not only can it not be modded for RGB, but many PAL games suffer from no optimisation at all, meaning those large black borders and much slower speeds also experienced with the SNES. By comparison, buying the US version is probably the way to go, as it can play Japanese games with

ANY CONSOLE THAT SELLS OVER 30 MILLION UNITS WITH MANY TRULY GREAT GAMES CANNOT RATIONALLY BE CALLED A FAILURE

the removal of the tabs inside the slot and it had available just about everything released in Europe and much more. The N64 is currently something of a cult machine, with a dedicated band of supporters who are gradually winning over people who dismissed it at the time.

In fact, many people consider the N64 to be a failure, especially when compared to the performance of the PlayStation, which has to date sold more than 100 million units. However any console that sells over 30 million units worldwide and has many games present in the bestselling and greatest ever games lists cannot rationally be called a failure. Nintendo revolutionised three-dimensional gaming and controllers via the N64, and it has an abundance of classics waiting to be discovered if you haven't done so already.

SPECIAL THANKS TO Lost Levels for the image of N64 *Final Fantasy VII*.

iQue Test

China has always been one territory that console manufacturers traditionally steer clear of due to the rampant piracy present within the country. Nintendo decided to try to break into the market with the creation of the iQue Player, released towards the end of 2003. On the outside it looks like the offspring of the N64 and Dreamcast controllers, but inside it uses console-on-a-chip technology to provide an N64 playing experience.

Games are stored on a 64Mb flash card contained within a cartridge that slotted into the device, which connected directly to the TV in a similar way to all those pirate rip-offs you see being sold on street markets. The games were available from an 'iQue depot' where they could be downloaded onto the cartridge. The unit was successful enough that Nintendo has released other versions of its more recent hardware in China to similar effect.





PERFECT TEN GAMES




GOLDENEYE


SUPER MARIO 64


F-ZERO X

GOLDENEYE

» **RELEASED:** 1997

» **DEVELOPED BY:** RARE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SABRE WULF

When Rare's *GoldenEye* first appeared in 1997 first-person console shooters were instantly given a massive shot in the arm (pun fully intended) and its impact sent shockwaves through the industry that continue to be felt to this day. Sniper rifles, four-way split screen, multiple missions, even duel analogue support (via two N64 pads) all made their first-person console debut in Rare's excellent shooter and even today it remains incredibly fun to play.

With its wonderfully designed missions, intelligently structured level design, excellent array of weaponry and utterly amazing multiplayer it should come as no surprise to learn that the only N64 game to ever succeed it was the development team's very own *Perfect Dark*. High praise indeed.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME

» **RELEASED:** 1998

» **DEVELOPED BY:** IN-HOUSE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER MARIO BROTHERS

We remember playing *The Ocarina Of Time* like it was yesterday. Link's tearful farewell to Saria, learning about the Deku Tree's imminent death, walking out onto the vastness of Hyrule field, playing the titular Ocarina for the very first time – they're all moments that become indelibly etched on your mind forever. If *Super Mario 64* proved that classic 2D franchises could work perfectly well in 3D, it was *Ocarina* that truly showed console owners just how much breathtaking scope the third dimension could actually offer them. No other adventure in recent memory has matched the perfection of *Ocarina Of Time*, and it's quite possible that none ever will.

SUPER MARIO 64

» **RELEASED:** 1996 (1997 UK)

» **DEVELOPED BY:** IN-HOUSE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DONKEY KONG

Few videogames have made the tricky leap from 2 to 3D as successfully as Shigeru Miyamoto's *Super Mario 64*. From the moment the Italian plumber's cheerful fizzog appears on the title screen to the final boss encounter, Mario's first three-dimensional outing feels as natural as breathing. Beautifully structured, perfect to control (unlike the recent DS outing) and home to one of the finest 3D cameras ever created, *Super Mario 64* retains its title as the finest 3D platformer ever made. And if that's not a good enough reason to include it in this top ten, then we don't know what is. A masterpiece of game design that no true gamer should miss.

LYLAT WARS

» **RELEASED:** 1997

» **DEVELOPED BY:** IN-HOUSE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER MARIO WORLD

Playing through *Lylat Wars* (or *Starfox 64* if you're overseas) is like taking part in your very own space movie – hell it's actually better than many of the *Star Wars* games. Everything about *Lylat Wars*, from its soaring operatic music, to its jaw-dropping visuals has been done on such an impressive scale that you can't helped but get fully immersed within the on-screen action. This sense of immersion is captured perfectly by your more-than-able Arwing co-pilots. Slippy, Peppy and Falco are now fully fleshed-out characters, while the opposing Starwolf team ignites an intense rivalry that was never apparent in *Starwing*. Fighting the forces of Andross has never been so much fun.

F-ZERO X

» **RELEASED:** 1998

» **DEVELOPED BY:** IN-HOUSE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** WAVE RACE 64

Okay, so it was yet another SNES update, but no other racer on the N64 (with the exception of Nintendo's very own *Wave Race 64*) came close to matching the sheer speed and excitement that *F-Zero X* offered. It may not have been the prettiest of games – there's a distinct lack of detail and plenty of fog – but it was amply compensated by the fact you could race against 29 other cars and that its snaking tracks zipped along at a blisteringly smooth 60 frames-a-second (something no 360 racer has currently achieved). With *F-Zero X* Nintendo managed to capture the very essence of racing in a 128mbit cart – nothing more, nothing less.


THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME


LYLAT WARS


BANJO KAZOOIE

NINTENDO 64

If choosing last month's Commodore 64 list was tough, this issue hasn't been any easier. In fact, it's probably been even harder. Before you start blowing a fuse though, just remember that these are opinions only and no harm is ever intended.





WAVE RACE 64



BLAST CORPS

WAVE RACE 64

» **RELEASED:** 1996 (1997 UK)

» **DEVELOPED BY:** IN-HOUSE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** F-ZERO

***Wave Race 64* was one of the first launch games for Nintendo's new 64-bit console and it instantly set a precedent due to its incredible physics, convincing water and superb gameplay.** The aforementioned physics allowed you to feel every ebb and swell that your jetbiker raced across, while the beautifully constructed courses ensured that you'd constantly return to them to shave precious seconds off your previous lap times. Ten years on and it's still considered by many to be one of the N64's greatest racers. After returning to it at this year's Retro Fusion event, it's not a statement we're going to argue with.

BLAST CORPS

» **RELEASED:** 1997

» **DEVELOPED BY:** RARE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

Rare's second N64 title was a game of such twisted brilliance that we're surprised a sequel to it has never appeared. When an out-of-control missile is set to destroy the world, you have to clear a path for it by jumping into a variety of different machines (including two giant robots) and destroying as much of the landscape as possible. The sheer destructive nature of the game harks back to the old arcade games of old, while Rare further fuelled the nostalgia buds by offering a variety of bonus levels that mimicked everything from *Pac-Man* to *Defender*. A refreshing, unique title that proved just what a powerhouse the N64 could be in capable hands.

BANJO KAZOOIE

» **RELEASED:** 1998

» **DEVELOPED BY:** RARE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DIDDY KONG RACING

If proof was needed that Rare could do no wrong on Nintendo's N64, look no further than this superb platformer. Featuring a fascinating gameplay mechanic – Banjo and Kazooie could be manipulated in a variety of different ways to solve problems – beautiful looking visuals and some fiendishly clever level design, Rare nearly managed to do the impossible and create a game that was better than *Super Mario 64*! Brimming with charm and humour – special mention must go to the hilarious hoedown at the beginning of the game–- and with just the right amount of item-collecting, *Banjo Kazooie* is a platform fan's dream and should be played by anyone with even a passing interest in the genre.

SUPER SMASH BROS

» **RELEASED:** 1999

» **DEVELOPED BY:** HAL LABORATORY

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** KIRBY'S DREAM LAND

Trust Nintendo to take a popular genre (in this case the beat-'em-up) and add its own unique spin to it. *Super Smash Bros* allowed 12 of Nintendo's most popular videogame characters to battle against each other in an ecstatic orgy of over-the-top cuteness. Four brawlers could take part and the aim of the game was simplicity itself: send your opponents flying from the ring before they do the same to you. While it lacked intricate special moves and the depth of titles such as *Street Fighter II*, the sheer amount of items you had access to – everything from lightsabers to Pokémon balls – and the chaotic battles easily made up for *Smash Bros'* few shortcomings.

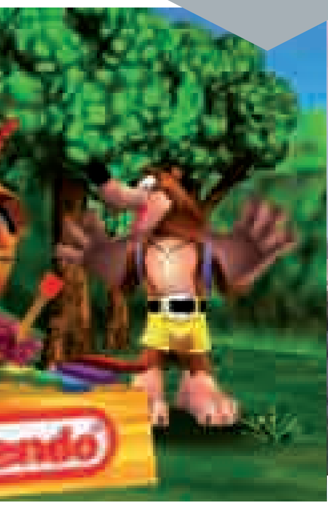
SIN & PUNISHMENT

» **RELEASED:** 2000

» **DEVELOPED BY:** TREASURE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MISCHIEF MAKERS

Treasure may have only released three games for the Nintendo 64, but we consider every single one of them to be a work of art that deserves to be played again and again. For the Perfect Ten we've gone with the superb *Sin & Punishment* though, because it pushed the machine like no other game. A simple on-rail shooter at heart, *Sin & Punishment* is nevertheless a giddying rollercoaster of a ride that instantly grabs you by the balls and doesn't let them out of its vice-like grip until the whole dizzying experience is over.





SUPER SMASH BROS



SIN & PUNISHMENT





NINTENDO 64 and the rest...

Nintendo's 64-bit wonder wasn't only the last home console to use cartridges, it also appeared to have more essential games than any other system. Don't belief us? Then check this little lot out…

01 AEROFIGHTERS ASSAULT
02 CHAMELEON TWIST
03 DIDDY KONG RACING
04 FIGHTER'S DESTINY
05 STAR SOLDIER 64
06 MARIO KART 64
07 DUKE NUKEM 64
08 ROBOTRON 64
09 PGA EUROPEAN TOUR
10 AEROGAUGE
11 SAN FRANCISCO RUSH
12 JET FORCE GEMINI
13 EXITEBIKE 64
14 QUAKE
15 SNOWBOARD KIDS
16 FORSAKEN
17 CYBER TIGER
18 MYSTICAL NINJA STARRING GOEMON
19 WETRIX
20 STAR WARS: SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE
21 MICRO MACHINES 64 TURBO
22 RIDGE RACER 64
23 TUROK RAGE WARS
24 MORTAL KOMBAT 4
25 ARMOURINES PROJECT S.W.A.R.M.
26 ARMY MEN: SARGE'S HEROES
27 RESIDENT EVIL 2
28 EXTREME-G 2
29 POKÉMON PUZZLE LEAGUE
30 COMMAND & CONQUER
31 RAMPAGE WORLD TOUR
32 GLOVER
33 WAVE RACE 64
34 BATMAN BEYOND: RETURN OF THE JOKER
35 PUYO PUYO SUN
36 DONKEY KONG 64
37 ROAD RASH 64
38 BAKURETSU MUTEKI BANGAI-O
39 RAKUGA KIDS
40 CRUIS'N USA
41 MISSION IMPOSSIBLE
42 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME
43 ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2000
44 STAR WARS: EPISODE 1 RACER
45 BASS HUNTER 64
46 MARIO GOLF
47 WIPEOUT 64
48 BATTLETANX
49 POKÉMON SNAP
50 FLYING DRAGON
51 TUROK: DINOSAUR HUNTER
52 BEETLE ADVENTURE RACING
53 LYLAT WARS
54 WCW NITRO
55 BANJO-TOOIE
56 SPACE STATION SILICON VALLEY
57 KIRBY 64: THE CRYSTAL SHARDS
58 GOLDENEYE
59 SIN & PUNISHMENT
60 CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY
61 SHADOW MAN
62 MARIO PARTY 2
63 DUKE NUKEM: ZERO HOUR
64 RAYMAN 2: THE GREAT ESCAPE
65 KILLER INSTINCT GOLD
66 SUPER SMASH BROS
67 SUPER MARIO 64
68 1080° SNOWBOARDING
69 TUROK 2: SEEDS OF EVIL
70 MARIO TENNIS
71 PAPER MARIO
72 BLAST CORPS
73 ROCKET: ROBOT ON WHEELS
74 POKÉMON STADIUM
75 DR. MARIO 64
76 PERFECT DARK
77 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK
78 BOMBERMAN 64
79 GEX 64: ENTER THE GECKO
80 MISCHIEF MAKERS
81 HARVEST MOON 64
82 MEGAMAN 64
83 CASTLEVANIA: LEGACY OF DARKNESS
84 MICKEY'S SPEEDWAY USA
85 QUAKE II
86 MAGICAL TETRIS CHALLENGE
87 F1 WORLD GRAND PRIX




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CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learned about retrogaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you actually want it to. Granted a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can picked up for less than a fiver, like Sunsoft's Batman. It costs less than a "Catwoman dance" at a gentleman's club, but lasts far longer.

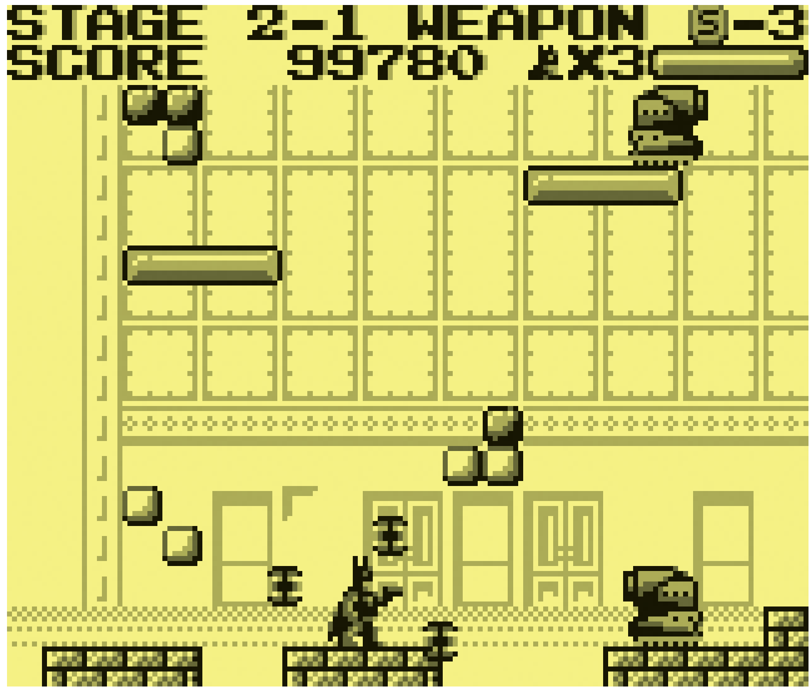
BATMAN

» **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PUBLISHER:** SUNSOFT
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE



There's something wonderful about the earlier games for Nintendo's Game Boy, when developers were still becoming accustomed to the machine's limitations in colour and screen resolution. When playing most of these earlier titles it's clear developers were holding themselves back, perhaps believing that large sprites or fast scrolling gameplay would render games impossible on the pea-green portable. As a result many fitted snugly on the screen with tightly balanced gameplay to match – they were arguably better than later games which tried to be bigger and faster (like the mess that was *Donkey Kong Land*), because they understood their limitations and hence worked so much better within them.

Batman by SunSoft is one such early example of miniaturised monochrome perfection. It has a lot in common with the original *Super Mario Land* on the GB (not just the fact that both can be found today for pennies); both contain the same super-distilled shrunk-down style and pacing. The main Batman character is only 16-pixels high (a bit more if you count his ears), while his enemies are of similar stature. Despite this there is much personality in the tiny beings, with the main protagonist being instantly recognisable as the caped crusader of Gotham City. Even though the visuals are smaller than later GB games, the game manages to pull of a few impressive visual tricks, including one where the entire screen twists vertically (noticeable on the title screen and when a level starts).

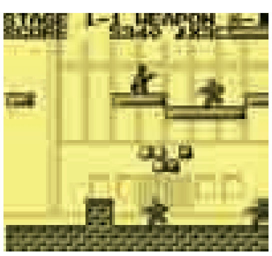


» Notice the spinning bat-shaped shields which encircle Batman, protecting him from damage.

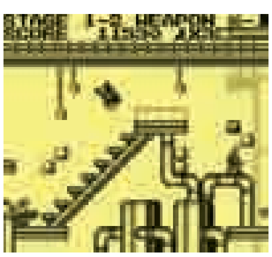
The gameworld is comprised of *Mario*-style blocks which can destroyed (using Batman's gun), and in some cases also contain valuable power-ups. Jumping physics are smooth with just the right level of floatiness, and with the small characters means you never have to make blind leaps of faith because the screen isn't showing the next platform. It all combines to make a game perfectly suited to the handheld – the platforming is effortless and innately fun, while the need to destroy blocks crudely borrows some of Mario's charm and reworks into a new structure. Batman can also walk while ducking, which leads to a desire for exploration and finding secrets. Scattered throughout the levels are various power-ups to collect: different weapons like wave guns and batarangs, extra ammunition to fire more than one bullet at a time, spinning bat shields, extra health, and of course core boosters.

To break things there's even some shmup levels, where Batman takes to his vehicle (Robin, to the Batmobile! Dunununununununun BATMAAAN! – Ed), which suddenly gains rockets and is able to fly. This has the same subdued style as the other levels, and not only proves great fun but is a wonderful surprise to find. After this there's further levels, including a rather tricky one which auto-scrolls, and suddenly you're fighting The Joker for the second time. Then the game has been won and is sadly over, leaving you a broken empty shell of your former self as you realise there is nothing new to discover. Dejected, you move to a small fishing village in the outer Hebrides, mending nets while waiting for your final days, forever thinking of the past and the time you nearly started a new religion based around SunSoft's handheld *Batman* title – Batmanism.

It may have been a film licence, and far removed from the other early *Batman* games, but it can still provide hours worth of fun. When you consider the likelihood of finding it for under £1 at a carboot sale, lying in a pile of other people's games and general junk (just beware of people trying to sell trashbags filled with ducklings), *Batman* is something to keep an eye out for.



» The sprites may be small, but the game was well balanced and made perfect use of the screen real-estate.



» There's a kind of minimalist ornate beauty to early GB games.



» The battarang (three of which can be seen above Batman's head) is the most useful weapon in the game.



» To break up the standard platforming sections, there are a few shmup levels high above Gotham City.



THE MEAN TEAM

SPRUNG FROM THE FERTILE LOINS OF COMPUTER AND VIDEOGAMES MAGAZINE, MEAN MACHINES IS STILL REGARDED BY MANY AS THE ULTIMATE VIDEOGAME PUBLICATION. DAMIEN MCFERRAN SPEAKS TO THE PEOPLE WHO CREATED THIS LEGENDARY MULTI-FORMAT MONTHLY



DATA BOX

» **NAME:** MEAN MACHINES
» **ISSUES:** 24
» **ERA:** 1995-1996
» **PAGES:** 100 (ISSUE 1)
» **STAFF:** JULIAN RIGNALL, OZ BROWNE, MATT REGAN, GARY HARROD, RICHARD LEADBETTER, PAUL GLANCY, ROB SWAN (ISSUE 1)

"The biggest driving force for me was simply, I absolutely loved games," comments Julian 'Jaz' Rignall, undoubtedly one of the most important figures in UK videogame magazine history. From humble beginnings at Ludlow-based Newsfield where he worked on seminal C64 publication ZZAP!64, Rignall moved down south to EMAP Images (a division of publishing giant EMAP that dealt exclusively with electronic entertainment) and within the space of a few months was editing the hugely popular Computer and Videogames (C+VG for fans of abbreviation). Whilst working on C+VG Rignall came in contact with a section of the magazine called 'Mean Machines' which was devoted to the rapidly emerging Japanese consoles. Arcade-fanatic Rignall was immediately drawn to the impressive coin-op conversions that were prevalent on these machines and noticed an opportunity that was too good to pass over. "At the time, there wasn't really a dedicated console magazine out there. I knew if we could be first to market and the mag was a good one, we'd have a big success on our hands," he comments. "I wanted to re-create the kind of tone and style of ZZAP!64, but take it one step further with even more in-depth reviews and more entertaining and outrageous editorial."

To achieve this noble vision, Rignall needed a team that shared his passion for videogaming. He was fortunate that C+VG had talented staff to spare and several would eventually cross over to work on the new magazine – a youthfully exuberant Richard Leadbetter being one of them. Leadbetter recalls just how much of an influence Rignall had over proceedings: "Jaz was in total editorial command, was 100% committed to games and was pretty much exactly as you would imagine him, having read the C+VG reviews and editorials. Mean Machines was entirely his vision and entirely an extension of his persona and his relationship with games. EMAP supporting his idea to produce a consoles-specific magazine was an endorsement of the extraordinary relationship that Jaz had with the readers. No other games editor since has commanded the kind of respect



» A 'Best Of' was released featuring bits from the first five issues.



that Jaz had with management, staff and readers alike". Uber-talented designer Gary Harrod was hired after his freelance illustration work caught Rignall's eye and the team set about creating 'Issue Zero' of Mean Machines – a short document that would give the bigwigs at EMAP an idea as to what the finished product would actually look like. It obviously had the desired effect and the green light was given for a release in October 1990. Despite the positive reaction from the publisher, there was an element of uncertainty about what kind of reception the magazine would receive once it hit the newsstands. "EMAP just didn't have a clue what kind of console audience was out there," recalls Leadbetter. Thankfully such fears proved to be entirely unfounded. Issue one shifted 40,000 copies – a very respectable number for a new magazine at that time, but a mere shadow of things to come.

The magazine was originally intended to cover the Sega Master System, Sega Mega Drive, Nintendo NES and Nintendo Game Boy, along with the hugely popular (but import-only) PC Engine. However, NEC's machine was dropped at the last moment in favour of the shiny new Amstrad GX4000 console (in reality a modified CPC6128+). Unfortunately Alan Sugar's new baby proved to be a spectacular failure and coverage of what little software there was available for it ceased after the first few issues. In hindsight it's easy to brand the dropping of the PC Engine as a proper forehead-slapping moment of stupidity, but from the viewpoint of the publishers it undoubtedly made more sense to cover an official UK machine like the GX4000 so they could benefit from the increased software advertising it would bring.

In order to keep sales as high as possible, a novel distribution method was concocted. "It was our strategy over the first ten or so issues to deliberately under-print issues to create scarcity and drive demand" reveals Rignall. "People missed issues, and would then reserve them at the newsagent so they wouldn't miss the next month's issue, meaning that each month our advanced orders would increase, and knowing we would be able to sell that many, we could incrementally increase our print run without over-printing and thus losing us money in unsold magazines". Clandestine tactics aside, the magazine's success grew with each issue. "It essentially exploded and the more copies were physically distributed the more the sales went through the roof," recalls Leadbetter. "By the end of the twenty-four issue run we were easily selling more than 100,000 copies a month". Soon, Mean Machines was challenging sister publication C+VG for the coveted position of bestselling multiformat monthly.

Paul Glancey, a C+VG staffer who contributed reviews to Mean Machines from time to time, recalls the incredible impact the new magazine had on EMAP's tightly-knit Priory Court office: "Everyone knew that all of the best games were appearing on consoles so they always got the most exciting stuff first on Mean Machines. We covered a lot of the same stuff, of course, but when you saw all those arcade-perfect Mega Drive and SNES games, it was sometimes a bit hard to maintain a great deal of enthusiasm for the latest Spectrum budget games".

Compared to the methods of magazine production today, the manner in which Mean Machines was cobbled together reads like something akin to an amateur fanzine rather than a professionally produced monthly with a circulation running into the thousands.

"We'd disappear into the fetid, smelly games room to actually play the games," Leadbetter explains. "We'd point an expensive Minolta camera at the screen in order to take screenshots on 120mm film – that would then be run across the road to a photographic studio where untold dodginess went on. Copy would be written on dirty Compaq 286s, edited by Jaz, then output on an enormously expensive (for the time) laser printer onto A4 paper. Gary and Oz (Browne, Art Editor) would then physically cut this copy off the page, stick it down, add screenshot boxes, photocopy the work and add colour mark-up info etc. Photos and page layouts would later return to the writer who'd furnish the captions. After that, pages would be couriered to the colour reprographics facilities who'd scan in the black and white pages, manually add in the colour, create film (and colour proofs for us to check if we were lucky), then it would all get sent to the printers".



» Mean Machines Issue Zero – a legend is born.





» *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* on the cover – yes, Issue 1 was that long ago.

ISSUE ONE SHIFTED 40,000 COPIES – A VERY RESPECTABLE NUMBER FOR A NEW MAGAZINE AT THAT TIME, BUT A MERE SHADOW OF THINGS TO COME

THE MEAN TEAM



» (From left to right) Julian Rignall, Radion Automatic and Richard Leadbetter pose for the camera



» Nintendo Magazine System – another massive success for the MM Team.

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

Mean Machines had many imitators, but French magazine 'Consoles+' took it one step further by entering into a unique deal with EMAP. "They basically took our layouts and Gary's art, changed all the names on the reviews and repackaged it," comments Leadbetter. However, things quickly turned sour. "I remember going back and forth to Paris over the period of a few months to help the guys make the magazine," says Rignall. "I spent a lot of time sitting around drinking battery acid coffee, smoking Gitanes and watching people shrug their shoulders. And because I used to fly out of London City Airport and was the only one on the plane not wearing a suit, I used to get yanked and searched every time cos they thought I was a drug dealer." Oo-er. "This was supposed to be the start of a great collaboration with the French," adds Leadbetter. "Consoles+ was basically one in a whole series of cash-ins that made EMAP huge amounts of money, but the people who made it approximately £0." The magazine is still published today, although the deal with EMAP is obviously long dead.



"THE TEAM WAS VERY SMALL DUE TO A TIGHT BUDGET, AND AS A CONSEQUENCE WE WORKED VERY HARD INDEED"

Producing the magazine tested the nerves of the team and the working environment was less than satisfactory. "Priory Court was an EMAP hell-hole" painfully recalls Leadbetter. "The arse-end of the London division, and a messy, paper-strewn dirt-ridden cess pool with zero ventilation, apart from an 'escape hatch' behind Jaz's desk which led to the fire escape. Temperatures in the summer would zoom over 35 degrees, especially in the cloakroom that doubled up as a games room". It wasn't just the conditions that were punishing – the hours were equally gruelling. "I remember days and days of coming in at 9:00 and working till way after midnight" remembers Rignall. "The team was very small due to a tight budget, and as a consequence we worked very hard indeed. Sometimes we worked so hard, when we'd get the finished magazines in, I'd be reading large portions of it that I couldn't remember writing". Thankfully the staff had the willpower to soldier on – mainly due to their passion for gaming. "Were it not for the fact that we loved making the magazine, had endless enthusiasm and energy and had a team of people that worked extraordinarily well together, we'd have all quit very quickly," says Rignall.

Rignall was true to his promise of more 'outrageous editorial', which came in the shape of numerous irreverent reader-driven features ('Insult Corner' and 'Pet Talent Corner' being two notable favourites). There was even a section of the magazine in which the fan base was encouraged to submit photos of recent 'prangs' their relatives' cars had been involved in. While all this had very little to do with videogames, it established a unique dialogue between the staff and readership – something that videogame publications have been desperately trying to emulate for years since, with varying degrees of success. Arguably the most memorable section of the magazine was the letters page – the domain of 'Mean Yob', an abrasive, insulting fictional character who had his roots within the pages of C+VG. The identity of the person behind Mean Yob's barbed replies has remained secret for years… until now that is. "Jaz did most of the good work there while he was at EMAP," reveals Leadbetter. "Maybe on the odd day here and there I'd fill in and take the piss out of the readers instead. Generally speaking though, in the early days I'd choose the letters for Jaz simply on the basis of giving him enough material to make for entertaining replies. I was rarely disappointed". Rignall gleefully confirms that insulting his readership gave him much pleasure: "I loved doing it – it was a good venting place for all the stress I got from running the magazine and having to make sure we hit the deadline month after month". The character was a massive hit and readers would fall over themselves to write in and receive their own ticking off and consequently Yob's razor-sharp comments were recycled as standard-issue playground ammunition in the early Nineties.

Two phenomenally successful years passed and it was evident that the console market was still growing. After 24 glorious issues the fateful decision was made to split Mean Machines into two separate magazines to cater for this rapidly expanding audience – Mean Machines Sega (MMS) and Nintendo Magazine System (NMS). Leadbetter, who would go on to helm the Sega offshoot, reveals the factors that influenced this choice: "Nintendo were notoriously litigious at the time so everyone was scared about doing a Nintendo-specific magazine. However, EMAP had secured the official Nintendo licence and it was seen as a licence to print money. Secondly, EMAP already had a big-selling multi-format magazine in the form of C+VG and there was an argument that we were holding back their sales. Thirdly, from a commercial viewpoint, the time was right to go format-specific – and it was also the time to move away from paste-up publishing and go for Quark Xpress layout instead".

Getting the official Nintendo licence was a massive coup for EMAP in what was becoming an increasingly competitive marketplace, but initially the staff at NMS approached the concept with a fair degree of tepidation. Angus Swan, who worked on both magazines, recalls: "Because the licensed magazine concept was a new one there was a sense of nervousness on both sides about how the relationship



» Gary Harrod's unique artwork graced many covers.



» T-shirt-related tomfoolery with Jaz Rignall and Oz Browne.



» Leadbetter, Radion and Rignall model the 'Monkey Ass' T-Shirt.





» In the days before the Internet ruined everything, you got your news from pages like this.

would work out, especially in relation to writer's language and poorly rated games. In the end there was never really a big problem as Nintendo's own games were usually excellent and they didn't give a toss if we slagged off the third-party product".

Unfortunately some of the readers were not exactly enamoured with the division. Those that owned both a Sega and Nintendo console now found themselves forced to buy two magazines every month in order to obtain the coverage they craved, and many complained that the separation resulted in a drop in overall quality. "It could be argued that Mean Machines was effectively diminished with the split into format-specific titles," admits Leadbetter, begrudgingly. The influx of new staff presented another problem for hardcore readers. The fresh writers were talented and eager, but the cherished team dynamic was subtly altered by their arrival. Angus Swan likens joining the Priory Court team to "being a replacement Sugababe". Pleasing the existing fan base wasn't easy, as he recalls: "There were lots of die hard readers who went on about how splitting the mags was a shit thing to do and the new writers were shit. There was a sense at first that I was not part of the original line-up and not 'touched' by that Mean Machines 'magic".

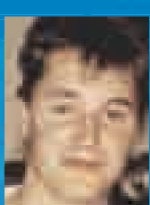
The established fans might have moaned, but it was largely irrelevant – the two new publications attracted thousands of new readers and the Mean Machines success story continued unabated. "I think the first issue sales were something like 148,000 for MMS and something totally stupid like 180,000 for NMS. It was an enormous success," remembers Leadbetter.

Never one to rest on his laurels, within the space of a year Rignall was once again getting restless. "By the end of 1993 I felt MMS, NMS and C+VG all needed a redesign. They were still following the same design conventions we'd established in 1990-91, and I felt the market was changing and they had to change to move with it". Not only did he want to give the current magazines a facelift, he decided the time was right for an all-new publication. "I firmly believed that we needed to launch a new type of magazine to start covering the new forthcoming generation of consoles" he continues. "So a very talented Mean Machines Art Director (Dave Kelsall) and I took time out to create a dummy of this "next generation" magazine with the working title "Techno". Even though I say it myself, I think it would have been a truly great magazine – it had some seriously cool ideas and a revolutionary look that I think people would have been blown away by". Sounds like a winner, surely? Not quite. EMAP was becoming increasingly unhappy with the level of competition in the videogame magazine sector and as a result the publishing giant was starting to look elsewhere for new ideas. "The boss of the EMAP division that published Mean Machines wanted to launch a home theatre magazine. We were against it for a variety of reasons, but nevertheless the boss put Techno on hold, and instead

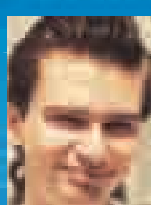


» Computer + Videogames – The birthplace of Mean Machines.

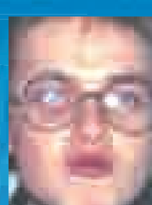
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



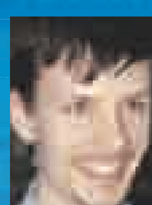
» **Julian Rignall** works in advertising in the US



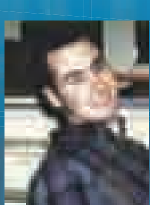
» **Richard Leadbetter** runs Digital Foundry (www.digitalfoundry.org) with Gary Harrod



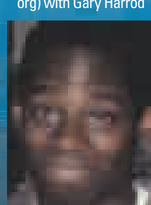
» **Paul Glancey** is Creative Manager at Criterion Software



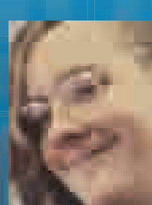
» **Gary Harrod** runs Digital Foundry as well as his own graphic design studio



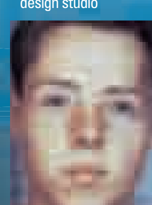
» **Angus Swan** is still with EMAP, working as IT Development Manager



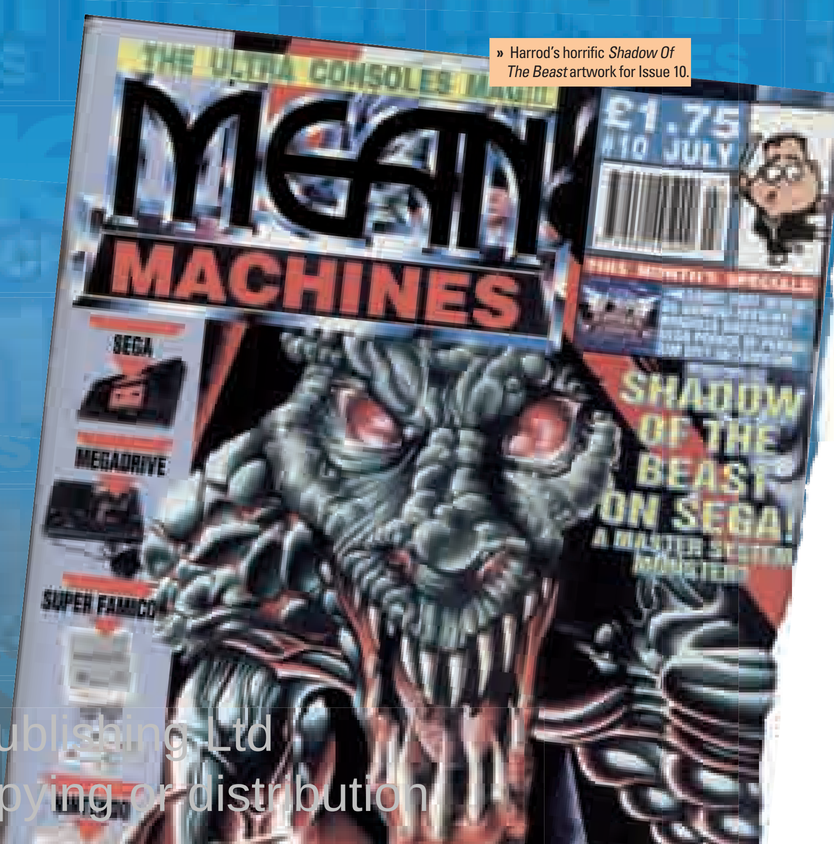
» **Oz Browne** is Art Director at Titan Publishing



» **Radion Automatic** is a freelance writer



» **Rob Bright** works as a journalist in India



» Harrod's horrific *Shadow Of The Beast* artwork for Issue 10.

THE MEAN TEAM



» **Left:** The letters page was always packed with reader artwork.

» A familiar face...





» If you loved imports, then Mean Machines was the magazine of choice.

THE FAILURE OF AN EXPERIMENTAL MAGAZINE WAS SOMETHING EMAP COULD JUST ABOUT TOLERATE – BUT LOSING 'GOLDEN BOY' RIGNALL WAS A FAR MORE COSTLY

went and presented his idea to Lord EMAP, and thanks to some creative number crunching got him to give it the green light. That meant all redesign and Techno launch funds went to this new magazine. I quit very soon thereafter, because I didn't want to see the Mean Machines portfolio of magazines being run into the ground and I also felt that not launching a new flagship games mag would be suicide for EMAP Images. And lo! After three issues, the Home Theatre magazine folded through lack of advertising and sales".

The failure of a largely experimental magazine was something EMAP could just about tolerate – but losing 'Golden Boy' Rignall was a far more costly inconvenience, as time would tell.

After over 50 issues, MMS folded during the Saturn era and the torch passed effortlessly to sister publication Official Sega Saturn Magazine (edited rather conveniently by Leadbetter). He managed to imbue the publication with much of the Mean Machines magic, employing talented young writers such as Gary Cutlack (of UK Resistance fame) and Lee Nutter. However, the fortunes of the magazine were determined by the total failure of the Saturn in the face of Sony's all-conquering PlayStation and as good as it undoubtedly was, it simply wasn't 'Mean Machines'.

The final nail in the coffin for the brand was the ill-advised 'Mean Machines PlayStation', which Leadbetter feels "completely missed the point of what Mean Machines was all about". It lasted a pitiful six issues before the plug was pulled. Rignall's grim prophecy had come true. "The Mean Machines portfolio of magazines – and pretty much everything else in the division – went into a steep decline and were all closed down or sold off within a year or so and EMAP Images was assimilated back into the EMAP fold never to be seen again" he recalls, sadly.

It's a decade since a magazine bearing the Mean Machines name last graced our newsstands. Is there a chance that this once famous brand could rise from the ashes? "If you get the right balance of team members, I daresay you could do a decent Mean Machines 'Neo'" comments Leadbetter. Rignall, however, is doubtful a new Mean Machines would stand a chance without the original staff: "It'd be like putting four musicians together doing cover versions of old Beatles songs and calling them "The Beatles". Not that I'm comparing us to the Beatles, but you get my drift – it would be Mean Machines in name alone".

Both Rignall and Leadbetter have moved out of videogame journalism now. Leadbetter runs media company Digital Foundry alongside former Mean Machines designer Gary Harrod and holds extremely positive feelings about his time with the magazine: "Aside from the shit wages, I have absolutely no negative memories whatsoever of that couple of years of my life. The camaraderie between the team members was simply terrific – the banter, the insults, the gaming championships on key games – the whole mentality was akin to a bunch of mates getting together to play games and then writing a fanzine about it, albeit one bankrolled by one of the UK's biggest publishers. The whole experience was a blast from start to finish".

Rignall has led a varied career that has seen him behind desks at Virgin Interactive, Imagine Games Network (IGN) and Wal-Mart Online. He now works in advertising in the US and regardless of how far he's come over the past 15 years still harbours fond memories of the time spent at Priory Court. "The MM crew were the funniest and most entertaining people I've ever worked with," he recalls. "There was a synergy between the team that created something none of us could achieve as individuals. We were always trying to outdo one another, and that created much outrageousness and envelope-pushing that was very evident in the magazine. Many people visiting the offices used to comment on what an amazing, highly creative atmosphere it had and how much fun we seemed to be having, even though we were working like Trojans. Some people thought it was some kind of diabolical anarchy fuelled by a bunch of foul-mouthed delinquents, which is also very true. It's all a matter of perspective I suppose".



» **Below and left:** It may not have received the official licence of Sega, but Mean Machines Sega was a far better effort that Emap's Nintendo equivalent.







» **Left:** Mean Machines Playstation lasted a pathetic six issues. **Middle:** Issue 5 - complete with mouth-watering SNES *Final Fight* screens. **Right:** *John Madden Football* was championed endlessly by the MM staff.



DUCK HUNT

ARE YOU LAUGHING AT ME?



- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **GENRE:** LIGHT GUN
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3+

HISTORY



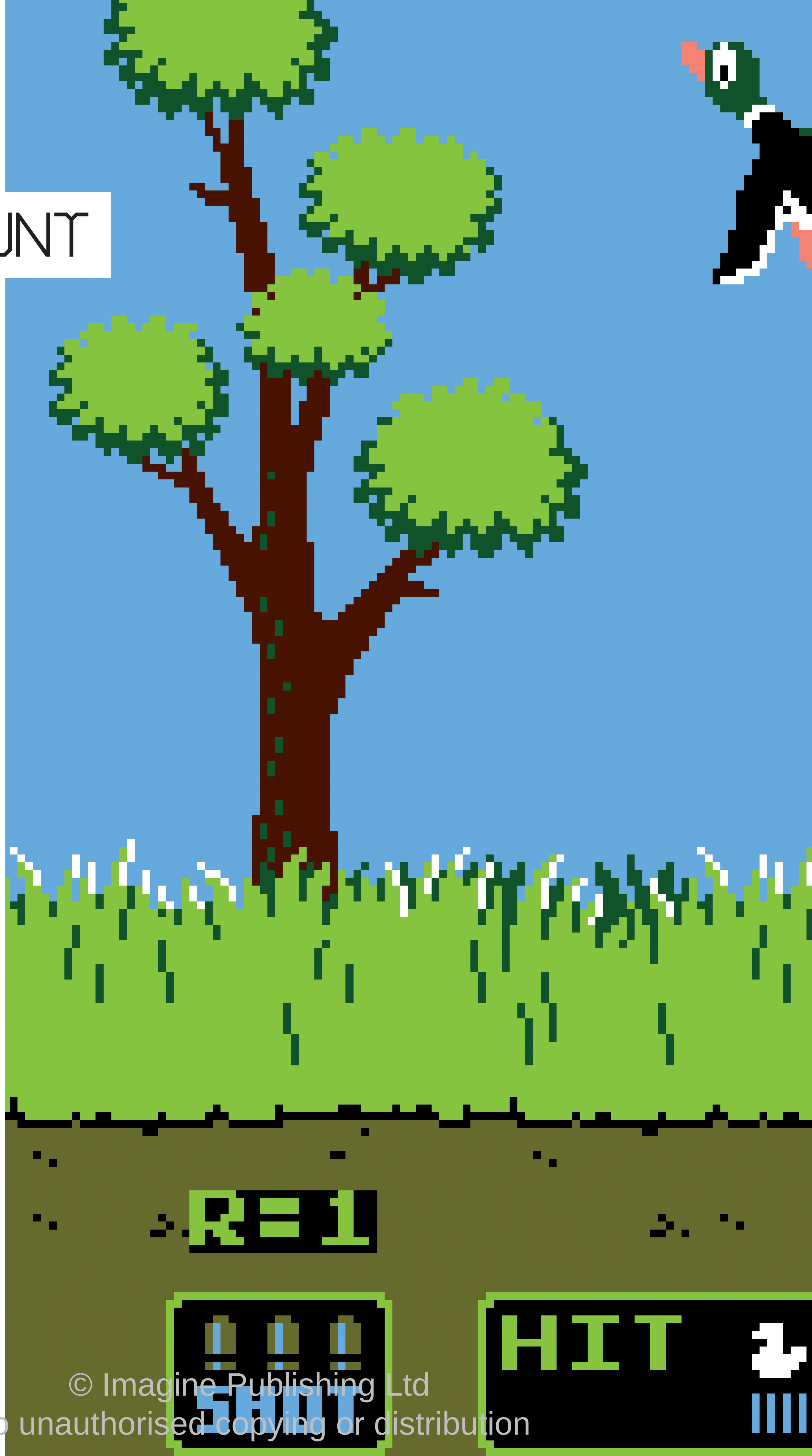
I'm desperate to get my hands on Nintendo's new console. It's not because it offers a revolutionary way to play games, or the fact that I'll be able to play a brand new *Zelda* game straight away on it (alright, so maybe it's a little bit of that). No, the main reason I'm looking forward to the Wii is because I'm finally going to be able to reacquaint myself with some of my favourite NES games (I sold my collection years ago due to space issues).

While I'll certainly be downloading the likes of *Super Mario Bros*, *The Legend Of Zelda* and *Metroid* (assuming they all make the initial launch list) it's *Duck Hunt* that I'm most looking forward to revisiting.

My relationship with this excellent light gun title began nearly 20 years ago when I used to play it in my local Boots whilst my mum went shopping. *Duck Hunt* would call to me, and I was drawn to it as a moth is drawn to a naked flame. And whilst I loved every minute I played it for, it always ended in tears (not literally of course, I was 14 at the time) when I was dragged off the machine at home time.

Fast-forward a few years and I managed to pick up a NES on the cheap at a local car boot for just under £30. It came with a smattering of classic games, including the mighty *Super Mario Bros 3*, but they didn't get a look in as I'd already loaded up *Duck Hunt*.

For all – or in fact because of – its simplicity, *Duck Hunt* remains one of my favourite light gun titles of all time and while it lacks the variety of *Point Blank*, or the sheer excitement that Sega's *House Of The Dead* games manage to offer, it remains an utterly captivating experience that never fails to charm me. And let's face it, how can anyone not be charmed by an on-screen chuckling dog?




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SCORE

THE MAKING OF...

WIZBALL



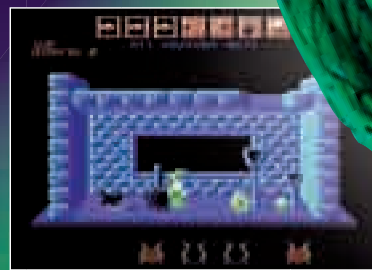
Widely regarded as one of the very finest Commodore 64 games, Wizball effortlessly combines frenetic shoot-'em-up action with, erm, colouring-in. Jon Hare and Martin Galway talk to Craig Grannell about the genesis of Sensible Software's psychedelic blaster.

Artwork by Bob Wakelin. Scanned by Mat Allen and Rob de Voogd.





» As if later levels weren't hard enough, even the paint drops have it in for you, spraying bullets everywhere.



» Back in the lab, Wiz readies a colour to apply to the current level, while his trusty cat laps up a saucer of milk.

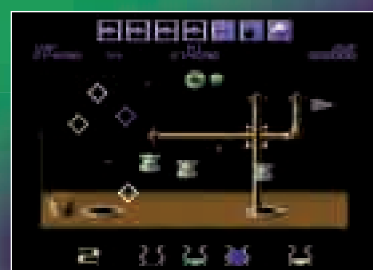
Labelling *Wizball* a horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up is like dismissing *The Godfather* as a gangster flick. Sure, Sensible Software's classic C64 effort has waves of enemies, power-ups and plenty of frenetic blasting action, but it goes above and beyond its contemporaries in so many ways. Taking control of Wiz, a wizard who has a bizarre penchant for travelling around in a green ball, you're tasked with bringing the colour stolen by the evil Zark back to the previously vibrant Wizworld. Rather than collecting components required to complete levels in a conventional manner, you shoot paint-blob enemies (who eventually gain a survival instinct, rather unhelpfully firing back on later levels), and use 'Catelite' (Wiz's pet cat, Nifta, encased in a flying green orb) to collect the paint drops. These are mixed in the Wizlab and applied to the current level. Three colours are required to complete each of the eight levels, and progress is punctuated by 'filth raids' (psychotic flying 'police' aliens that spew bullets) and frantic bonus rounds.

With so many ideas shoe-horned into the game, it's not surprising that *Wizball*'s development ethos was very different to that used for contemporary games. "*Wizball* was put together in a very organic way," explains Jon Hare. "It started as a *Nemesis*-inspired shooter – hence some of the enemy waves – and a bouncing control method that Chris [Yates] was playing with." From there, the concept grew, incorporating the game's most obvious differentiator: colouring the levels. "This seemed like a neat idea, and a good mechanic for level progression, along with giving us something novel for enemies to drop when destroyed," says Jon. However, the paint collecting initially worked very differently. "In the early stages, *Wizball* had underground caves – something later used in *Wizkid* – where the Wizball grew a body and went exploring for coloured drops to fill the landscape in," remembers Jon. Memory restrictions led to the now-familiar paint-blob aliens and the introduction of Catelite as a means of collecting the drops. "Catelite was a nice control idea – probably Chris's – and the cat character was based on Chris's cat Nifta, who was always around when we were making games," remembers Jon. "Once the cat was there, he became the obvious paint collector, with the paint drops becoming similar in concept to humans in *Defender* or babies in *Insects In Space*. As Chris and I had been playing co-op *Dropzone* a lot at the time, we decided to add a co-op two-player mode, enabling one player to control Catelite. It fitted together neatly, like most good design ideas do!"

Rather than paint-blob aliens being randomly distributed throughout the current level, Sensi decided to further break from tradition, providing players



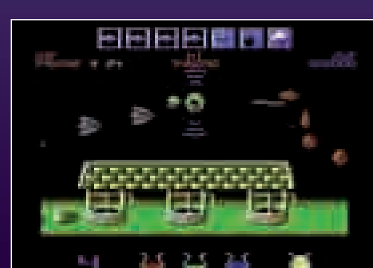
» The Wizball bounces around, but control can be gained by collecting two pearls and doing some swift waggling.



» Even on lowly level two, plenty of Zark's minions are out to destroy your exterior design plans.



» Frenetic blasting action in *Wizball*'s meteor-strewn bonus round, which offers the chance to bag an extra life.

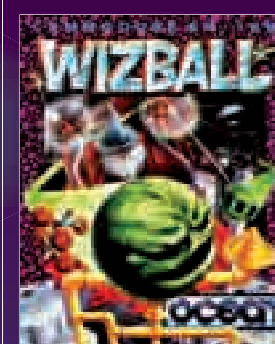


» As a one-player game, you have to balance Wiz's survival with the need to grab falling paint drops with Catelite.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
» **DEVELOPER:** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2

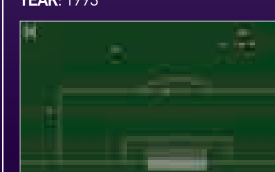


DEVELOPED BY

S.E.U.C.K.
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1987

SENSIBLE SOCCER
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1992

CANNON FODDER
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1993



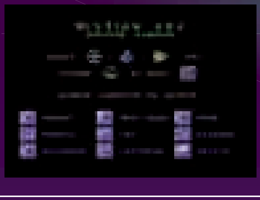
THE MAKING OF...

WIZBALL



BOUNCY (WIZ)BALLS

Although enjoyed by the majority of those who've experienced it, *Wizball* has left a sour taste in the mouths of some gamers – mostly those who can't get to grips with its control method. Initially, the Wizball bounces around the landscape and off of objects, but as the handy 'Wiztips' screen shows, two of the earliest power-ups available are 'thrust' (which provides 'in-flight' control) and 'anti-grav' (which provides full, standard eight-way control over the Wizball). On lower levels, eight of the aliens that always leave pearls behind when shot are immediately available, making it pretty easy to get anti-grav working, although if you've no permanent power-ups on later levels, a bouncing Wizball spells almost certain doom. "We thought the bouncing emphasised the uniqueness of the game," explains Jon. "Also, it was a good point to drop you back to, to penalise you for poor play!"





» Catelite makes a beeline for a grey paint drop, which will make him 'indescructacat'.

with three 'active' levels, accessible via a network of 'up' and 'down' entrances. "This came from a definite desire to break up the standard level flow, but it also aided the RGB colouring-in factor – we needed to ensure there was always an available level dominated by red blobs, one by green and another by blue," explains Jon. Therefore, completing the lowest active level rendered it inactive – empty of all enemies – but unlocked the next higher level, with tougher enemies and trickier-to-navigate landscapes.

These ideas provided layers of strategy. Along with trying to keep Wiz alive – one hit from a bullet or enemy causes the Wizball to explode in a shower of shards – you have to look out for and protect Catelite. Without the ever-faithful cat (who is rather more durable than Wiz, expiring after losing nine lives), paint-collection – and therefore, progress – isn't possible, but if Wiz's lives are all lost, the game is over. *Wizball* is a juggling act – a mix of blasting, quick dives with Catelite to grab falling paint drops, and regular retreats from hoards of hostile enemies. Later levels require regular trips between active levels, as the colours require elaborate mixing, and over-cautious players are hampered by the aforementioned filth-raids, should an enemy not be dispatched for a period of time. Additionally, players must be eagle-eyed when grabbing paint drops, because five non-standard colours randomly appear. Two are 'friendly': a white drop provides the player with a bonus Wizball and a grey drop increases the cat's number of lives. However, three unfriendly colours lurk: purple drops make the cat crazy, sending it zipping around the screen, until it expires from damage; a light-blue drop causes a major filth raid, with multiple 'police' ships; and a black drop makes the landscape invisible. "The filth-raid and mad cat are classic Sensi touches from the old days when fun was allowed, without it having to be built into a milestone schedule!"

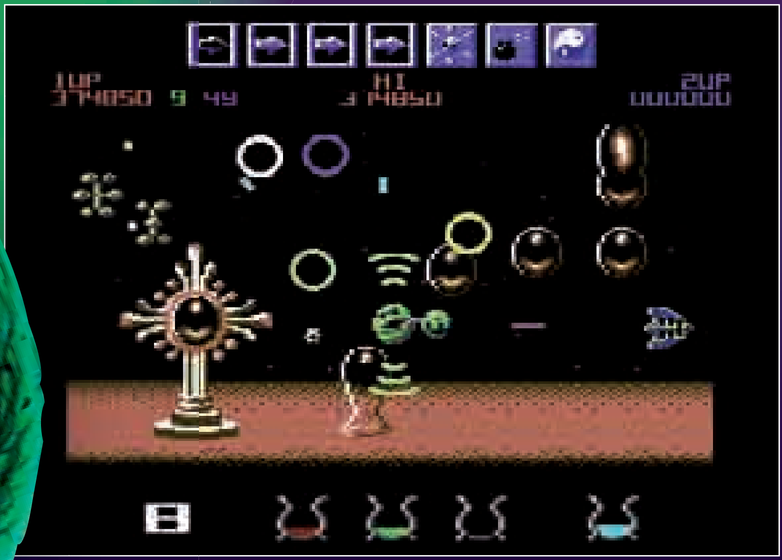
Usefully, respite of a sort is provided in *Wizball*'s bonus rounds, which offer a chance to grab an extra life (if you survive long enough), and the tranquil surroundings of the Wizcave (where you select a permanent power-up, and watch Wiz mix the current colour while Nifta gulps down a saucer of milk). But were these strategic elements in any way planned, or was it all a happy accident? "All our games were made in the same way: create some great game mechanics, good AI and a decent level structure, and the gameplay looks after itself," claims Jon. "By offering the player a flexible strategy in a structured progression format, it is naturally occurring that the player experiences both freedom and a sense of direction – thus, they can create



» Wiz mercilessly slaughters some helpless hoops, thinking how great it would be if none of Zark's minions could fight back.

"WIZBALL WAS PUT TOGETHER IN A VERY ORGANIC WAY, AND NOT REALLY PLANNED IN THE WAY MODERN GAMES ARE"
JON HARE





» Enemies close in as Wiz aims to get enough paint to add the third colour to the final level.



» Wiz ponders for a moment his decision to use brown as the base layer for this glass-oriented level.

"FOR THE 'GAME OVER' TUNE, WE ALL SIMULTANEOUSLY AGREED THAT AN OUTRAGEOUS 'F*CK YOU!' GUITAR LICK WOULD SUFFICE; IT'S A POKE-IN-THE-EYE, BREAKING THE FICTIONAL MOOD, SINCE YOU'RE PULLED OUT OF YOUR GAME EXPERIENCE" MARTIN GALWAY

their own gameplay and feel it was all some pre-designed strategy!"

Wizball isn't considered a classic just because of its gameplay – it's one of the prettiest games on the C64. But was Wiz always envisaged as a wizard in a grinning green ball? "The ball came first… the wizard was a storyline tagged on near the end," admits Jon. "At Sensi, we'd often create a world and justify it with a dubious storyline!" In hindsight, Jon considers the main character graphics purely functional in design, but remains fond of his work elsewhere: "As an artist, I'm proudest of the backgrounds. My favourite level is the final level, which was the first time I attempted to draw glass on a computer. Mount Rushmore was a 'running out of ideas' moment…"

And then there's sound effects and music, crafted by the talented Martin Galway. Jon notes that "although we gave Martin ideas of what was intended to be conveyed, we just let him get on with it," adding that "I have a feeling Martin played the games as well, which gave him a better feel for the effects!"

Martin remembers becoming involved with the project because Sensi's agreement with Ocean was that they weren't set up to provide music. "Ironic, since Jon and Chris were accomplished musicians capable of working on that aspect of the game," says Martin. "But since Ocean had me in-house and I'd already wowed them with *Parallax*, there was a natural fit."

Freed from the constraints of Ocean's movie and coin-op tie-ins, Martin felt free to experiment, and worked alongside Chris and Jon when some of *Wizball*'s music was composed. "For the simpler tunes, I owe a great deal to the guitar-playing of Chris and Jon. For the 'game over' tune, we agreed that an outrageous 'f*ck you!' guitar lick would suffice. The game itself had a trippy feel to it, which we wanted to continue in the music, but for the game-over tune, we wanted a poke-in-the-eye, breaking the fictional mood, since you're pulled out of your game experience." Chris duly obliged, picking up his electric guitar and playing a perfect rendition of the tune. "When they came back, I'd recreated his tune inside the C64, making it more massive-sounding than the plain guitar version, and the lads loved it," says Martin.

The bass-line tunes were done in similar fashion, in collaboration with Jon, who provided loops and riffs, but the title-screen music was Martin's. Martin reckons that it's influenced by the Vangelis album *China*, although he's never owned a copy: "I'm not saying I ripped it off – just that I had flavours of that album in my mind as I composed *Wizball*'s title-screen tune. I guess the process was rather like trying to cook a meal you've eaten, but having to guess at the ingredients – it comes out different, but has some similarities."

SID fans will be aware of the shift in tone half-way through the track, which Martin says was down to completing the first part of the tune, doing the rest of the work on the project, and then returning to Ocean's Manchester office to quickly completing the title track before becoming embroiled in other games. "I contemplated the mysterious process of creating magic potions that the wizard would go through, and that gave me the basis for the second part of the composition," explains Martin. "The first part evokes the wondrous, magical land that the game takes place in."

Looking back, Martin reckons the music holds up pretty well: "I should have perhaps paid more attention to the end of the title-screen tune, and tried to extend it while keeping the same style. But otherwise I think it's probably the audiovisual pinnacle of my C64 days; there's not much that comes near it."

Despite the unconventional nature of the game, critical acclaim arrived in droves, but this didn't surprise Jon, who considers *Wizball* "one of the most 'complete' games we ever produced". Commodore User awarded *Wizball* a Screen Star, and only the grumpiness of Gary Penn denied the game a Zzap!64 Gold Medal. "*Wizball*'s greatest accolade was a 'game of the decade' award from Zzap!, which made up for the lack of a Gold Medal, and also ranks as one of my greatest achievements in gaming," says Jon, who considers *Wizball* one of three 'classic' games he's worked on. "The other two are *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder*. I've worked on other great games, but not in the same league!"

SON OF WIZ

Wizball gained a 16-bit-only sequel in the early Nineties – the utterly bonkers *Wizkid*. "The idea of the Wizball gaining a body and walking around was something I'd originally planned for the 8-bit original, but we didn't have enough memory," recalls Jon, who's also adamant that *Wizkid* is a true sequel, rather than a mere spin-off: "The characters are the same – as is the spirit of the game". One major change, however, is the game's inspiration, as Jon explains: "We decided to base the game on *Arkanoid* instead of *Nemesis* and *Defender*, and see what transpired… The crosswords and kittens and stuff just fell out of our heads like unwanted children and ended up in the game. Had we put out *Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Roll*, I believe that would have been a further sequel, with the same anarchic and humorous spirit found in *Wizball* and *Wizkid*."





» What Mount Rushmore is doing on this alien world is anyone's guess, but Wiz will be splattered all over it if he doesn't deal with the incoming enemies.



» After Catelite grabs a light-blue paint drop, the fuzz arrive, dispensing their brand of justice on an unfortunate Wiz.



» 'Wot a Wizace!' exclaims the game, treating you to a flypast of each level once all three colours have been applied.



» Harrowing screams meet you on the game-complete screen, with the colour wrenched from the world again.

THE CLASSIC GAME

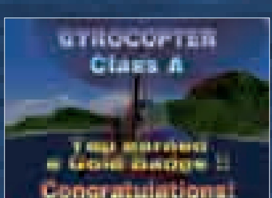
PILOTWINGS 64



Birdmen, cheesy porno music, rocket belts, giants made of metal, and apparently a texture of the Turin shroud hidden in a cave. Paradigm Entertainment managed to do a lot in time for the N64's launch. John Szczepaniak returns to the skies to explain why he preferred Pilotwings 64 over Mario 64.



» Nothing like a nice bit of skydiving – just try not to get killed. The range of tasks in this game is incredibly diverse.



» Stay focused and aim to get gold medals on every level – then for the ultimate test, attain perfect scores.

IN THE KNOW



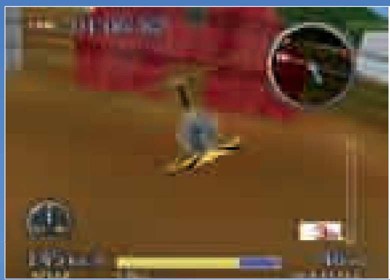
» **VERSION FEATURED:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** PARADIGM ENTERTAINMENT
» **RELEASED:** 1996
» **GENRE:** SURREAL FLIGHT-SIM
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

The N64 launched with only two games – *Mario 64* and *Pilotwings* (plus a third, *Saikyou Haniu Shogi,* if you insist on being pedantic). It was of course Mario which captivated and encouraged people to buy the system; he was Nintendo's all-jumping non-shaving star. Shamefully it overshadowed this equally excellent "flight-sim" from Paradigm Entertainment. Admittedly when receiving my N64 soon after launch, with both games, it was *Mario 64* which I both played first and more intensely. But it was *Pilotwings 64* which I continued to play even after attaining perfect scores of 100 on each every level; I continued to play years later, long after the N64's death – thanks to its open-ended nature, ability to create personalised goals, and above all, because no other aerial game has ever tried to match it in terms of surreal styling and blithe pacing. To put it simply, a decade later and on reflection, I think *Pilotwings 64* was the better launch title.

The N64 iteration has little to do with its SNES predecessor, which was far more serious in tone. Instead of being developed in-house, Nintendo farmed it out to Texas-based Paradigm Entertainment. The outsourcing of key games can be worrying, due to the possibility of the chosen company underperforming, but in this case Paradigm deserves to stand tall and proud for the amazing job they did.

There are three main vehicles to control (Hang Glider, Rocket Belt, and Gyrocopter), set over four different classes: Beginner, A, B and Pilot class – each corresponding to one of four locations. The first is Holiday Island, which is quite small, featuring a scenic castle and fairground. Then there's Crescent Island (tropical rainforest, caves, whales, and a large waterfall) along with Ever-Frost Island (a mostly barren place of icy mountains and an oil refinery). The highlight though, and where most enjoyment comes from, is Little States – a detailed recreation of America (sans Alaska and Hawaii), complete with cities and prominent landmarks such as Mount Rushmore (including Mario's head). This makes for 12 main "stages", each consisting of up to three tasks which are scored out of 100; each stage has target scores for Bronze, Silver and Gold medals.

Each task, once completed, can be replayed at leisure, increasing the points and getting closer to those medals. This makes it perfect to dip in and out of. While it's easy (maybe dangerously too easy when you've got live ducks basting in the oven on a tight time limit) to spend hours and hours simply relaxing in the skies, you can also nip in and notch your score up slightly on any given level. It proves to be perfectly balanced, with an open-ended structure that adapts itself to each person's playing style. With such ingenious implementation, which is so perfect and more importantly so very fair it's amazing other games don't copy it, there is tremendous satisfaction from practicing and then finally achieving a perfect score. Meanwhile, getting a silver medal in each class will unlock a series of bonus levels: Cannon, where you're fired at distant targets; Skydiving, which includes points for maintaining formation; Jumble Hoppers, which involves bouncy shoes; and finally the Birdman suit, which has no set goal and is simply there to casually enjoy the sights. The biggest attraction beyond the standard tasks



» Aim for the barn door, squeeze through, and then fly out the other side all without crashing.



» *Pilotwings* is full of so many nice little touches, like this launching space shuttle. Go on, race it. We dare you.

COOL STUFF

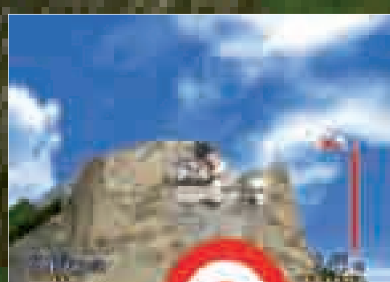
There's so many cool things in *Pilotwings 64* which we weren't able to mention; to hell with a proper boxout, we're going to ramble about some of the available goodies. You can take photos in the Hang Glider and then save them to an album, preserving your great moments forever (at least until the battery dies). You can pretend to be the Gyro-Captain from *Mad Max 2* and do crazy stunts, before stopping by a "gas station" to refuel. How about flying into Nessie? Trying to land on moving ships? Or shooting whales while screaming loudly at the TV "Who is Kaiser Soze?!" Or trying to crash the Gyrocopter into innocent gliders? Or shooting Mario's Mt Rushmore face and turning it into Wario? Then of course there's the rumoured Turin shroud texture on Ever-Frost island. And all the birdman stars! Like a mail-order bride, this game just keeps giving and giving.



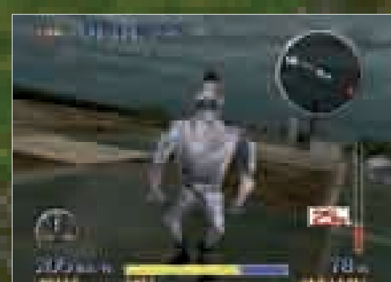
"THE BIGGEST ATTRACTION BEYOND STANDARD TASKS IS THE OPEN-ENDED NATURE AND FACT YOU AREN'T PENALISED FOR IGNORING THE GIVEN MISSION TO GO OFF TO DO YOUR OWN THING"



» The visuals aren't as amazing as they were a decade ago, but they're perfectly functional and on occasion quite nice.



» After shooting Mario's face on Mount Rushmore it turns into Wario, as seen here.



» Meca Hawk, technically the only baddie in the game, requires several swift rockets to be destroyed. Make him dance!

(which involve flying through rings, taking photos and shooting things), and also the reason why I still play it years later, is the open-ended nature of the gameplay and the fact you aren't penalised for ignoring the given mission to go off to do your own thing. Bored of the rings? Then why not try barnstorming, driving on the road, landing on the dam, flying under an oil rig? The Little States area has countless things to distract you, while the game-engine encourages experimentation. Simply make up your own goal and go for it! Or add beer and friends to the mix for a great party game.

Everything is designed to encourage the player and be innately fun, a stark contrast to other overly complex flight-sims which have you wrestling with dials and controls rather than enjoying the actual flying. The 3D engine and physics, while not as astonishingly impressive anymore, are neat, functional, and despite their comparative simplicity today don't detract from the overall experience. More importantly is that when coupled with the sublime analogue joystick, the controls are as smooth as Johnson's Baby Oil on warm Teflon. And let's not forget the music: high-twanging and super-cheesy guitar licks which sound like they come straight from a cheap porno, coupled with some laid back and very soothing music in the hang glider levels. After a gruelling day's work (such as being a games journalist – Ed), the surreal and chilled-out atmosphere, along with the music, is a wonderful way to unwind.

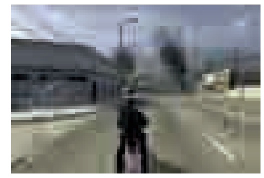
Thinking about it, if we were to forsake the faux-intellectuality of magazines which state few if any games are actually flawless, and that all games in some way must have negatives, we'd have to say *Pilotwings 64* is actually a perfect game. There is honestly nothing to fault, in the perspective of its era. All that's really needed is a visually updated sequel for the Wii, or even the original with some improved textures. Make it happen Nintendo, and watch as the nation never goes to work again.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BEETLE ADVENTURE RACING
SYSTEMS: N64
YEAR: 1999

SPY HUNTER
SYSTEMS: PS2
YEAR: 2002

TERMINATOR 3: THE REDEMPTION
SYSTEMS: PS2, XBOX, NGC
YEAR: 2004







DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

SIERRA ONLINE

ADVENTURE GAMING LEGENDS SIERRA MADE THE JUMP FROM MERELY DESCRIBING WHERE YOU WERE, TO ACTUALLY PUTTING YOU THERE AND LETTING YOU EXPERIENCE IT FOR YOURSELF. CRAIG RITCHIE INVESTIGATES HOW THE MEANING OF 'LOOK' CHANGED FROM 'WHERE AM I?' TO 'TELL ME ABOUT WHAT I SEE.'

IN BRIEF

Sierra originated in 1979 when young husband and wife team Ken and Roberta Williams set out to create their own adventure games from home. Over the following years the company went on to release arguably the groundbreaking adventure games of all time, and continually pushed the envelope in terms of technological innovation and player immersion. Their popularity lasted almost two decades, and the loyal fanbase, which survives to this day, highlights the immense impact that Sierra has had on people's lives.

It's a funny thing, circumstance. As the old adage goes, nothing is certain except death and taxes. And sure enough, if it weren't for the joy of tax returns, chances are we would never have seen Sierra's legendary *Quest* games. Way back in 1979, while remotely coding an income tax program on a mainframe computer located on the other side of America, a young Ken Williams stumbled upon a file named Adventure. He ran the application, and found himself standing at the end of a road facing the most legendary brick house in adventure gaming history. He called his wife Roberta to have a look, and after a bit of fiddling around the two became hooked. Ken's coding took a back seat for the next three weeks until they'd finished the game, at which time Roberta became adamant that she wanted to make her own interactive adventures. After many hours planning and designing at the kitchen table, On-Line Systems was born.

With his programming skills and her imagination, the couple set about creating what was to be the first ever graphical adventure game, *Mystery House*. Sporting basic monochrome line drawings to accompany the text, the game's parser allowed players to enter simple commands of one or two words. Released in 1980 for the Apple II, *Mystery House* went on to sell more than 10,000 copies, an outstanding feat considering that at the time there really was no established home software market to speak of.

Encouraged by *Mystery House*'s popularity, Ken and Roberta went on to produce a number of adventure and action titles under the banners of SierraVenture and SierraVision, and in mid-1982 changed their title to Sierra On-Line – a name that would soon become synonymous with adventure gaming. The limitations of the hardware at the time, though, meant that while Sierra had the innovation of



graphics, their games sometimes felt as though they lacked the depth of some of their competitor's releases. Yet this was no reflection of Roberta's creativity – in fact, her games were stretching the Apple II as far as it could go, and still she was left with an end result that paled next to her initial concepts.

The Williams knew that Sierra needed a computer system that could faithfully realise Roberta's ambitious designs. Thankfully for them, and for the gaming public, that is exactly what happened. While Sierra was finding its feet in an industry that had yet to find its own, their greatest boon came in the form of a relationship with another company looking after its own interests. IBM was devising a way to promote their new home system, the PCjr, and felt that this could best be achieved through the development of a game, which would fully show off its capabilities.

And so it was that in 1983, after a reported $700,000 funding by IBM, Sierra On-Line developed a groundbreaking engine for graphical adventure games. Called AGI (quite simply, Adventure Game Interpreter), it allowed characters to move freely around the background, with prioritized horizontal 'bands' giving the illusion of depth (if the player were above band 3, for example, then they would appear behind any objects in band 1 or 2). As is the case with so many gaming milestones, this amazingly simple innovation proved revolutionary, and the first animated "3D" adventure game was released – the legendary *King's Quest*.

Never before had gamers experienced such freedom of movement and character control. *King's Quest* had screen after screen of graphically detailed locations in which the player could roam around and try different actions on different objects. The game's vocabulary was so extensive that it was possible to do – or attempt to do – nearly anything one could imagine.

King's Quest's runaway success saw Sierra On-Line hire developers to work on more titles using the same engine (or, rather, interpreter), resulting in some of the most popular adventure gaming franchises of all time: *Space Quest*, *Police Quest*, and of course *Leisure Suit Larry*.

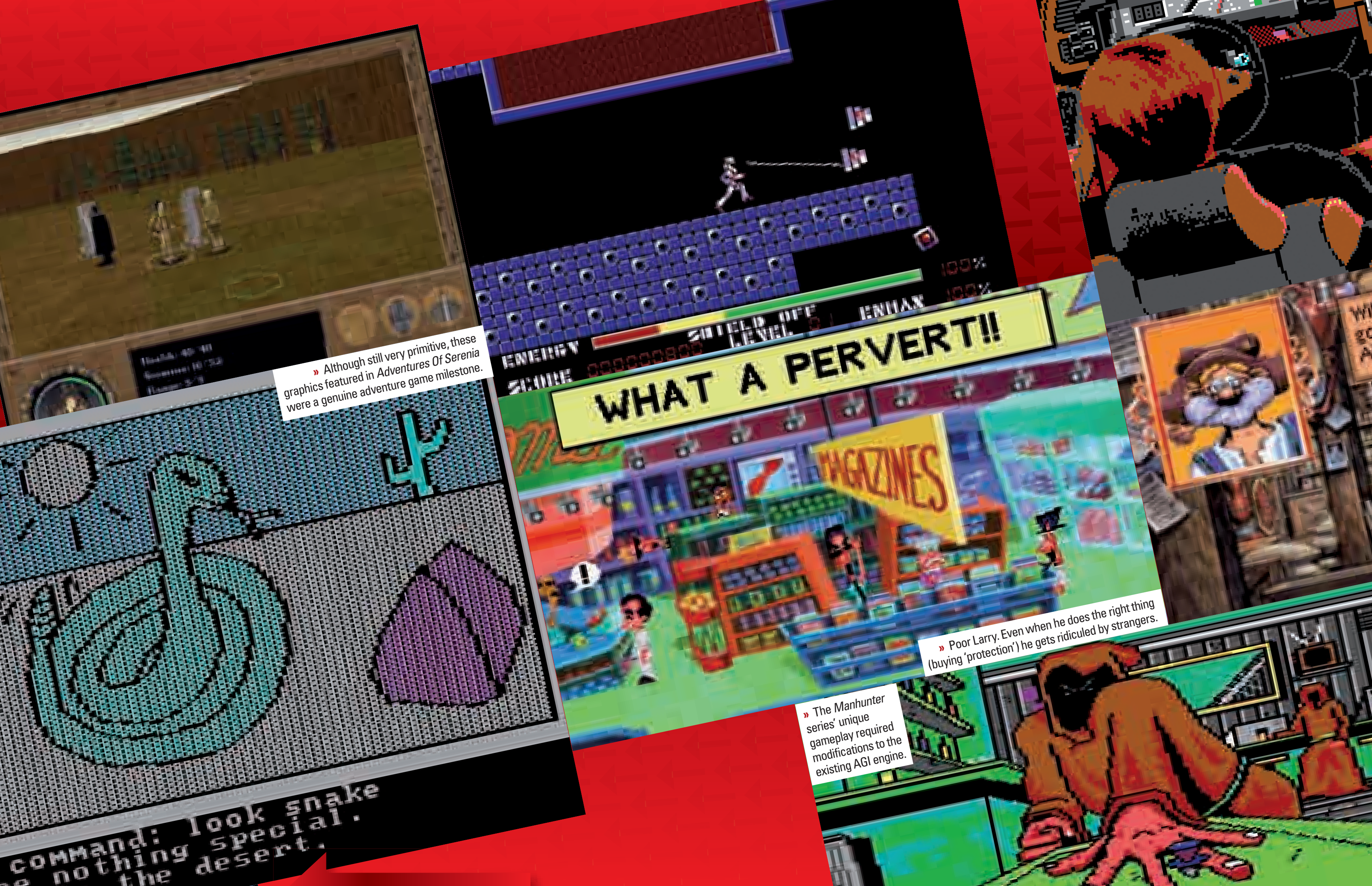
It seemed that Sierra could do no wrong, and for much of the Eighties and early Nineties the PC was the domain of the graphical adventure game. *Leisure Suit Larry* creator and Sierra legend Al Lowe gives us his insight into this phenomenon: "Adventure games were perfect for the Eighties, especially the early Eighties when you had to be a geek just to own a PC, let alone boot it up and get anything to run on it! As using DOS meant managing config.sys and autoexec.bat files, it took a puzzle-solver comfortable with command lines and used to spelling correctly just to run the computer. There was no spell check back then – PC's were totally unforgiving. All these things were perfect for our adventure games, which I guess were just perfect for the market at the time."

As popularity spread, often by word of mouth, the freedom to explore and immerse oneself in Sierra's extensive electronic environments touched the lives of computer

FRUSTRATING DEPTHS

One of the most trying aspects of the old *Quest* games was that the player could often find themselves lacking a particular item that was no longer accessible. You definitely didn't want to find yourself aboard the ship in *Gold Rush!* without having bought any citrus fruit, for example, or you would soon find yourself suffering from an unavoidable bout of scurvy… While frustrating on the one hand, what this also meant is that Sierra's games were given more depth and considerably longer completion times as players explored every inch of every screen for less obvious items, knowing that rushing through anything could lead to in impasse hours down the line. This additional exploration factor inevitably lead to the player reading more dialogue boxes, interacting with more of the scenery, and hence having the experience of a larger and more engaging world.

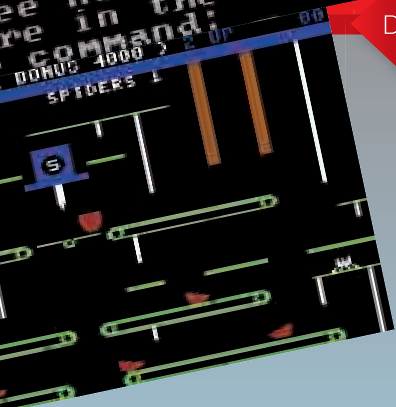
AND SO IT WAS THAT IN 1983, AFTER A REPORTED $700,000 FUNDING BY IBM, SIERRA ON-LINE DEVELOPED A GROUNDBREAKING ENGINE FOR GRAPHICAL ADVENTURE GAMES



» Although still very primitive, these graphics featured in *Adventures Of Serenia* were a genuine adventure game milestone.

» Poor Larry. Even when he does the right thing (buying 'protection') he gets ridiculed by strangers.

» The *Manhunter* series' unique gameplay required modifications to the existing AGI engine.



gamers the world over. "Once, I met this guy from Russia," says Lowe. "He was a computer consultant over there just when the Soviet Union was breaking up. He told me how every computer he'd ever been on in Russia had a Sierra directory with a LSL sub-directory. He said he'd never looked at a Hard Drive that didn't have it – it was like it was actually a part of DOS!"

Then he laughs, adding, "I guess we only sold one copy to the whole of Russia though!"

Still, successful sales in the USA and abroad naturally led to company and employee growth. "It was pretty much any time you found somebody who was willing to work there, we grabbed them," adds Lowe. "Ken was a big racquetball player. He met a guy at the gym playing racquetball who was a retired Californian Highway Patrol officer, and he started telling Ken stories. Ken basically said you've got a hell of a lot of cool stories – want to make a game? And that's how Jim Walls got started on *Police Quest*."

Due to their remote location in the forests of Oakhurst, California, Sierra also began outsourcing its games to programmers who would work remotely. In a forward-thinking move well ahead of the now familiar notion of the home-office, Sierra displayed a knack for locating and recruiting talent wherever it was based. "Al Lowe worked out of his home for the most part for *Leisure Suit Larry*," says Dave Murray, one of the creators of Sierra's celebrated *Manhunter* titles, "while Jim Walls worked on *Police Quest* in a guest house on Ken William's property. The guys that did *Gold Rush!* lived in a trailer in the Sierra parking lot!"

The Murrays, too, developed their games from home. "We flew to Sierra during the last two weeks of development so that we could interact with the play-testers, help with inserting music into the game and with conversions to Apple and other computers. We had all the support that we asked for and it was a friendly place to work."

In 1988, Sierra upped the ante once more and released noteworthy sequels *King's Quest IV, Police Quest II* and *Leisure Suit Larry II* – the first games to make use of their new engine, SCI (Sierra's Creative Interpreter). While basic mouse control and a pop-up input box added to the functionality, it was the inclusion of synthesized sound and a significant improvement to the graphics (SCI doubled AGI's horizontal resolution) that marked the major steps that Sierra had taken with their new interpreter.

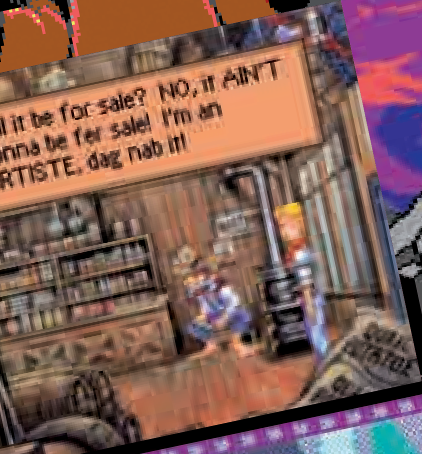
"AGI was a simple game engine tailored primarily to adventure games," explains Brian Provinciano, developer of the freely downloadable 'make-your-own-Sierra-game' package SCI Studio. "SCI was, on the other hand, designed to be much more complex and versatile to no specific type of game. In fact, the majority of the adventure game aspects of SCI games were written not in the engine, but in the scripts. By doing it this way, they could ensure the games ran exactly the same on all platforms. SCI was designed more as a portable virtual machine with graphical and sound capabilities rather than a simple adventure game engine. It was way ahead of its time – an object-oriented virtual machine years before Java."

Later incarnations of SCI saw the elimination of typing altogether as Sierra embraced a more Lucasarts-esque method of icon driven mouse input, entering the VGA era with the 1990 release of *King's Quest V*, Sierra's first 256-colour game. Although developers such as Origin were already stretching PC hardware to the limits to show off just what was possible, Sierra seemed specifically focused on using new hardware – particularly the storage capacity of CD-ROMs – to develop ways to further engross players into

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

While today's PC and videogames may have near uniformity in terms of packaging and contents (read: one DVD and a simple manual), back in the Eighties and Nineties it was standard fare to include all manner of books, maps and other paraphernalia in the box. Sierra, being no exception, produced some very memorable packages throughout the years. The gaming experience was thus significantly enhanced through all of these extras by offering back-story for additional depth, helping the player along via tips and clues, or simply acting as copy protection (*King's Quest 3*, for example, was impossible to finish without knowing the spells in the manual). Some items, such as the cut-out masks in *Space Quest 3* or the pencil and notebook in *The Colonel's Bequest* have now become collector's essentials.







» *The Black Cauldron*, aimed at younger players, was a great result of Sierra's good relationship with Disney.





» As part of his quest for the Holy Grail, King Arthur had to free Sir Lancelot from the Lady of the Lake's icy prison.





» Ah, love... Prince Alexander, like his father King Graham, put himself through some serious trials to find his bit of all right.



its game worlds. Creating ever-more detailed and colourful environments, rich musical scores, and even professionally voiced speech were all par for the course in Sierra's own quest for greater player immersion.

"At the time we didn't know we were doing anything earth-shattering," admits Lowe. "We were primarily making games we wanted to play. We enjoyed it, and it really wasn't until I built a website and started getting emails from fans that I realised how many people played those games and enjoyed them. Sure, I got spreadsheets every month of how many copies had been sold. But that's a number on a line in a box, you know? I never put together the fact that every one of those copies was somebody trying to solve those puzzles we created. Once I retired and started allowe.com I got tens of thousands of emails. I answered every one of them, not only from people who had a lot of fun but also really touching ones from people who said I'd changed their life because through playing *Larry* they then got into programming. Only then I realised that we were in a special place at a special time, and that was due to our isolation. It was partly due to the fact that it wasn't down the street from another game company, where we could go down there to solve problems and ask them how they do things. No, we were just kind of pioneers out in the forest. We didn't have a clue what influence we had."

Sierra's great success would continue through to the mid-Nineties with a slew of well-received sequels and original titles, as well as some hugely popular VGA remakes of their older AGI adventures. In 1994, business was booming and Sierra's head office was moved from its sleepy roots in Oakhurst, California to the hustle and bustle of Bellevue, Washington. On top of this, Sierra had been publishing titles from Japanese developer Game Arts (most notably *Thexder* and *Silpheed*) and had acquired Jeff Tunnell's Dynamix, an excellent development house responsible for such hits as *Red Baron, Rise Of The Dragon* and *The Incredible Machine*. It was all growth, growth, growth.

Sierra's story was truly a classic tale, from a young couple's dream in the late Seventies to a multi-million dollar success story a decade and a half later. But the sad truth was that the dream scenario would soon come to an end as Sierra's continuing expansion and market prominence attracted the big money men and the chaos that invariably follows once motivation switches from creativity to greed.

Sierra's demise began in 1996 when the company was purchased by CUC International, thus taking its first steps into the corporate world. Ken Williams had to relinquish executive control over his 17-year project, and things went downhill soon after. Entire divisions were stripped of staff or shut down altogether, resulting in hundreds of employees being laid off as the new management focused solely on impressing shareholders. There appeared to be little to no concern about the games (or the human beings) that had gotten Sierra there in the first place. It was a terrible time, a horrific dream-turned-nightmare, as Williams could do nothing but watch as Sierra

SIERRA'S GREAT SUCCESS WOULD CONTINUE THROUGH TO THE MID-NINETIES WITH A SLEW OF WELL-RECEIVED SEQUELS AND ORIGINAL TITLES

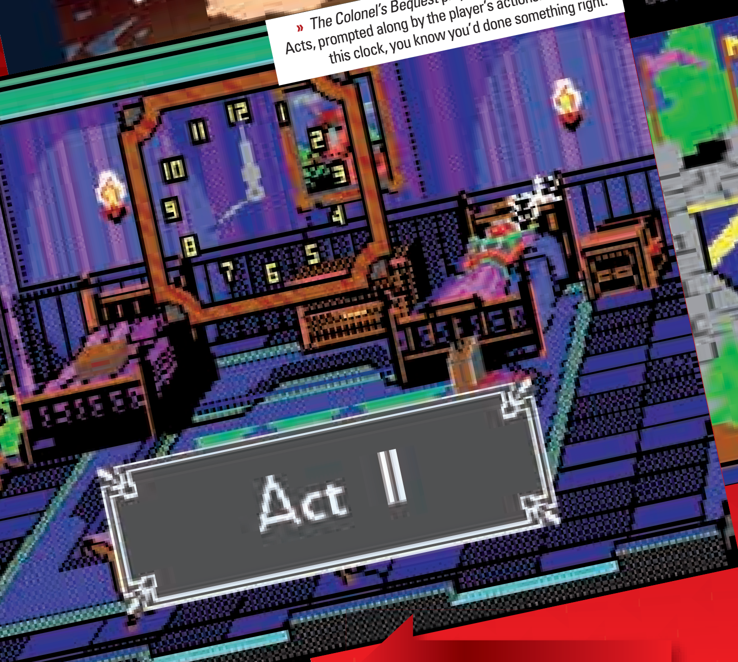


» *The Colonel's Bequest* played out over a number of Acts, prompted along by the player's actions. If you saw this clock, you know you'd done something right.



» Jane Jensen's macabre voodoo-themed title, *Gabriel Knight*, was one of Sierra's most challenging titles. Al Lowe admits having to phone Jensen after a few days because he didn't have a clue what to do.







» *King's Quest I*: This is where it all began...





» Were you sure to walk all the way round the car before Sonny Bonds hit the streets?



was stripped of any hint of its former glory. Big business was in full swing, mergers and acquisitions were in abundance, and it was not long before CUC International added the ultimate insult to the already catastrophic injuries: it was responsible for one of the largest cases of accounting fraud in American history. Stock values plummeted, high-level executives were tried and imprisoned, and even more people lost their jobs. Sierra – and its hundreds of employees – was hopelessly caught up in the middle.

In late 1998 Sierra was sold to Havas, a French company who then sold it to the Vivendi conglomerate soon after. By now nearly all of the original creative teams were either fired, dissolved or had already moved on to better things. The new Sierra released a few more sequels to its popular franchises, but fans generally agreed that these games were rushed jobs, which showed little passion on behalf of the developers. By this time, the industry's attention had shifted to consoles and 3D gaming, and with a marked decrease in both the quality and quantity of Sierra's titles, fans had to face the reality that the adventure game's Golden Age was over.

Things just got worse over the following months, culminating on 22 February 1999, a day that would come to be referred to as 'Chainsaw Monday': Sierra's executive management made the radical decision to close the original studios in Oakhurst.

Over 250 employees lost their jobs, people's lives were thrown into shambles, and Sierra's soul was truly lost in a maelstrom of corporate disarray. The next few years were nothing more than a string of layoffs and closures until, in 2004, the last bastion of the old Sierra fell with the closure of the Bellevue offices. Sierra, in all but name, had died.

"Vivendi owns the word Sierra and the brand and all the assets of the company," says a noticeably more sombre Lowe, "but as for the employees, they have all scattered to the winds. With software companies, it's all about the intellectual properly, the creative ownership – the intelligence. When you take away all those people, all you've got is the word 'Sierra' and the words 'Leisure Suit Larry'. You can try making it into a good game, but it won't work – not even if you try your hardest, not even if you spend millions of dollars. *Magna Cum Laude* proved that. That's because all the original people are gone. The company went into a death spiral when everybody left. With the accounting irregularities, then the selling of the name, it was just a terrible mess. As for a real company of people answering phones by saying 'Hi, we are Sierra,' that stopped on 27 August 2004."

Fast forward now to the present day. The Sierra we knew and loved is little more than a memory, immortalized by the numerous fan-sites that dot the web: Dedicated programmers have developed software studios that enable anyone to make their own AGI or SCI games. There are a handful of completed home-brew games available for free download, and a good number of these show great dedication and talent. Some serious effort has been put into excellent, professional quality remakes (see boxout). Each of these labours of love stands testament to the phenomenal impact that Sierra's games have had on their fans.

"I think people that have played classic Sierra games and really gotten into them have always had ideas in the back of their minds about their spin on a certain game, or their idea of a new kind of hero," says Eric Fullerton, maintainer of AGI Studio. "Offering something like AGI Studio to someone like that is a dream come true". And the great thing is that a number of these homemade games are actually rather good. "I've played a lot of AGI games and tested quite a few," continues Fullerton, "and I'll say my top favourites are

AL LOWE ON SERIOUS FANS

"The craziest fan mail I ever got was a parcel about two by three feet wide and an inch thick. I opened it up and it contained dozens of pieces of cardboard cutouts. This guy had coloured each one in with crayons to create the characters he wanted in the game. He had written up a whole storyline and had big pieces of coloured cardboard making up the background for each screen. You then had to move these people around according to the story. That was probably the weirdest thing I've ever received."



» *The Dagger of Amon Ra.* Perfect for those gamers who like their adventuring to have an Egyptian twist

» The board game like Jones in the Fast Lane was one of a number of excellent non-adventure titles released by Sierra.

» Larry 5 saw players alternate between controlling Leisure Suit Larry and Passionate Patti.

Thanks to Al Lowe, Dave Murray, Brian Provinciano and Eric Fullerton for their input and contributions to this story. The full transcript of Ken William's letter can be read at Josh Lulewicz's excellent www.vintage-sierra.com. With thanks to Mobygames.com for several images

Space Quest: The Lost Chapter, Time Quest, V: The Graphic Adventure and *URI Quest*. These are all really wonderfully polished games and they truly belong in the Sierra family."

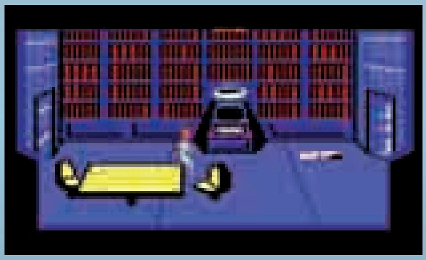
Sierra has touched lives – more so than any other games developer of its time, and it is the soul of the original company, from the early days around the kitchen table to the last true adventures of the mid-Nineties, which the fans remember. Sierra's impact on the world of gaming, and in fact its entire legacy, can best be summed up by Ken Williams himself, in an extract from a letter written to former employees after the extensive layoffs that came about after 'Chainsaw Monday':

"I console myself in the following way, and perhaps it will help you to cope with what has occurred. Let's imagine that a stranger had walked up to any of us on the street in 1979, and said: "Would you like to move to one of the greatest cities on earth? While you are there, you can play a key role in creating a company that just about everyone will know and respect. Your grandchildren will be amazed when they learn that you once worked there. You will be the envy of your peers, because they will know that your team created the largest collection of hits ever to come from one company. There will even be years when you will have played a role in over half the products on the industry's top ten lists! You will be surrounded by incredibly intelligent, hard working people, who will work 20+ hours per day when it takes it to get the job done. And, you will have more fun than you ever thought possible. There's only one catch though. This will only last for 20 years." Even knowing it wouldn't last forever I would have followed that stranger anywhere. I'm disappointed that it didn't last forever, but a 20-year ride on the greatest roller coaster on Earth beats the heck out of life in the slow lane any day. Life may never be the same, but it also isn't over, and we all have some great memories we shall never forget."

SIERRA HAS TOUCHED LIVES – MORE SO THAN ANY OTHER GAMES DEVELOPER OF ITS TIME

REMAKES

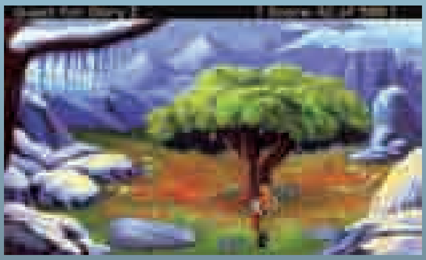
The *King's Quest* series has also seen a number of very impressive fan-made remakes. *King's Quest I, II* and *III* have all been released with VGA graphics as well as digital music and speech. AGDI have added to the originals by taking the liberty of tweaking the games by including new puzzles, a deeper plot and more back-story to the characters. *King's Quest I* and *II* can be downloaded from www.agdinteractive.com and *King's Quest III* from www.infamous-adventures.com. AGDI's site also offers a preview of their current work in progress: a VGA remake of *Quest For Glory II*.







» With the rise of VGA graphics and digitised sound, Sierra stepped things up by releasing excellent remakes of their original classics.



TIMELINE

Sierra's back catalogue reads as a roadmap of videogaming progress. Here's just a few of its past titles. How many do you remember?

1980-1



MYSTERY HOUSE

1980

(Apple II)

The first adventure game to ever incorporate graphics, basic, as they were. Roberta Williams' *Mystery House* was the one that started it all. The game's unexpected success in an industry still in its infancy paved the way for things to come. Numerous elements of this murder-mystery themed adventure would be revisited by Williams almost a decade later in *The Colonel's Bequest*.



SOFTPORN ADVENTURE

1981

(Apple II, with a PC port released in 1991)

This text-based adult adventure, which featured a nude (yet modesty-preserving) Roberta Williams on the box, would later go on to be the inspiration for the legendary *Leisure Suit Larry* series. Much like Larry, it was widely pirated and enjoyed by young males the world over.

1983-5

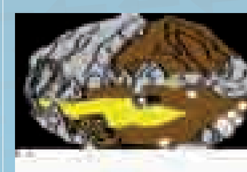


KING'S QUEST: QUEST FOR THE CROWN

1983

(PC, Apple II, Tandy 1000, Amiga, Atari ST, Sega Master System)

Said to have cost IBM over $700,000 to develop, this was the title that changed the face of adventure gaming forever. Technological innovation allowed for unprecedented freedom of movement and provided players with a completely new experience that truly touched lives and elevated Roberta Williams to the status of gaming icon. *King's Quest*'s engine, the groundbreaking AGI, would be the benchmark for adventure games for years to come.



KING'S QUEST II: ROMANCING THE THRONE

1985

(PC, Apple II, Tandy 1000, Amiga, Atari ST)

AGI's first sequel provided more of what fans loved the first time round, the lack of technological advances over its predecessor doing little to affect its popularity. Here was more story, more puzzles, more of everything that had made the original such a success.

1986



THE BLACK CAULDRON

1986

(PC, Apple II, Amiga, Atari ST)

Using a slightly adapted AGI engine designed for a younger audience, *The Black Cauldron* did away with the text parser and instead used single keys for talk, use etc. By now Sierra had a good working relationship with Disney, and their end result was an enjoyable and memorable use of the licence.



SPACE QUEST: THE SARIEN ADVENTURE

1986

(PC, Mac, Amiga, Atari ST)

Another outstanding original that introduced us to inter-galactic loser Roger Wilco, *Space Quest* was packed with the humour and sci-fi cultural references that fans would come to love over the years. Despite being especially appealing to geeky sci-fi nuts, Scott Murphy and Mark Crowe's masterpiece had something for everyone, and went on to be one of Sierra's most popular franchises ever.



LEISURE SUIT LARRY IN THE LAND OF THE LOUNGE LIZARDS

1986

(PC, Amiga, Atari ST, Apple II, Apple IIGS, Tandy TRS-80)

Al Lowe's brainchild that went on to be the most pirated game of its generation, and possibly the most pirated game of all time. Everyone knows *Leisure Suit Larry*. Its risqué themes, loveable-loser protagonist and genuine laugh-out-loud funniness proved an instant hit around the globe. Larry was the everyman hero: it was great to have him doing the stupid things we'd all like to do but could never get away with in real life. *LSL* will go down in history as a landmark gaming achievement.

1987

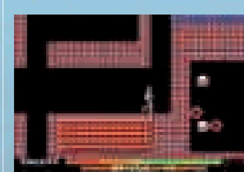


POLICE QUEST: IN PURSUIT OF THE DEATH ANGEL

1987

(PC, Amiga, Atari ST, Apple II, Apple IIGS)

A very serious, very difficult adventure, *Police Quest* oozed unparalleled realism thanks to the input from co-producer Jim Walls, a former California Highway Patrol officer of 15 years. *Police Quest* spawned a number of sequels as well as a VGA remake in 1992.



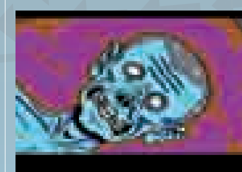
THEXDER

1987

(PC, Amiga, Apple II, Apple IIGS, Mac, Tandy TRS-80)

In an unusual departure from Sierra's typical adventure games, this side-scrolling shooter from Japanese developer Game Arts saw the player controlling a robot/jet transformer taking on hordes of high tech enemies. Containing both platform and flying elements, interspersed with a couple of puzzling situations, there was enough variety to keep players hooked and see *Thexder* go on to be a bestseller.

1988

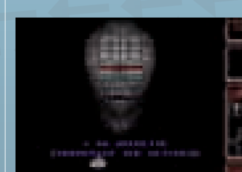


MANHUNTER: NEW YORK

1988

(PC, Amiga, Atari, Apple II, Apple IIGS, Mac, Tandy TRS-80)

The Murray clan's dark and foreboding tale of a world overrun by the alien Orbs was so demanding that it required modifications to the standard AGI parser in order to handle their design. Winner of the 1988 Game of the Year Award, *Manhunter: NY* offered a non-standard storyline, a non-standard interface and non-standard puzzles which all came together to create a truly outstanding gaming experience.



SILPHEED

1988

(PC, Tandy TRS-80)

Again, Game Arts takes a standard genre and adds enough tweaks to make it rise above the crowd, and, once more, Sierra makes a wise publishing choice. A vertical scrolling shooter with a perspective tweak giving the impression of 3D, fans regard *Silpheed* as a classic. Together with *Thexder*, *Silpheed* provided gamers with all the instant blasting action they needed when they felt like taking a break from solving all those damn *Quest* puzzles.

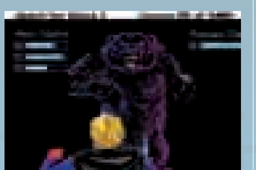


KING'S QUEST IV: THE PERILS OF ROSELLA

1989

(PC, Apple II, Apple IIGS, Amiga, Atari ST)

Sierra's first title to make use of their new SCI engine, *King's Quest IV* also saw an AGI release to cater for fans with less powerful machines. The SCI version saw Sierra introduce midi audio, the synthesized score breaking new ground in player immersion. New technology, a great story, a female protagonist and the introduction of the concept of time in terms of having day and night meant that Roberta Williams was on to yet another winner.

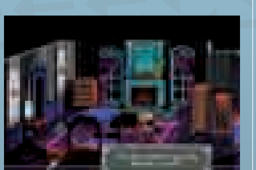


QUEST FOR GLORY: SO YOU WANT TO BE A HERO

1989

(PC, Amiga, Atari ST, Mac)

A true gaming milestone, this classic is heralded by some as the first truly replayable RPG/adventure hybrid. This exceptionally popular title from Lori and Corey Cole had it all: a great story, interesting characters, beautiful locations and a variety of RPG and standard quest elements which all combined to create one of the most memorable adventure games of all time. Which was your favourite – fighter, magic user or thief?



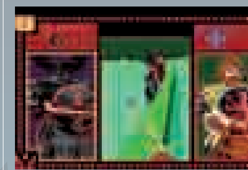
THE COLONEL'S BEQUEST

1989

(PC, Amiga, Atari ST)

Roberta Williams' great – although quite complex – murder mystery which first introduced us to Laura Bow. Set in the mansion and surrounding grounds of the Dijon Estate in the Twenties and themed as a play set over a number of Acts, this was an excellently crafted game. Being very dialogue driven, *The Colonel's Bequest*'s varied characters had true depth and personality. The storyline presented an enthralling mystery with lies, red herrings and many great twists along the way.

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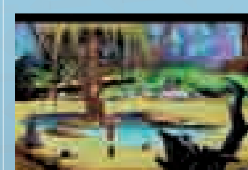


CONQUESTS OF CAMELOT: THE SEARCH FOR THE GRAIL

1990

(PC, Amiga, Atari ST)

Offering a level of depth and detail that stands head and shoulders above many of the adventure games available at the time, this title pushed the SCI engine to the limits. With RPG elements, action sequences, great puzzles plus a box bursting with background material, *Conquests Of Camelot* was peppered with so much Grail-lore and historical authenticity that it was not merely a game so much as an engaging and inspiring lesson in Arthurian legend.



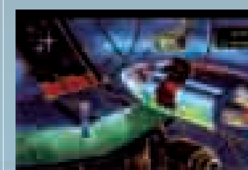
KING'S QUEST V: ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GO YONDER

1990

(PC, Amiga, Mac, NES)

Massively hyped, and for good reason, *King's Quest V* heralded a new epoch in Sierra's legacy. Embracing CD ROM technology, 256-colour VGA graphics, digitized speech, a new mouse-driven interface and a professionally mastered soundtrack brought Roberta Williams' game world to life more than ever before.

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SPACE QUEST I: THE SARIEN ENCOUNTER

(VGA remake)

1991

(PC, Amiga, Mac)

One of a number of VGA remakes to the original Sierra classics, *SQ1VGA* brought back everything we loved about the original repackaged in 256-colour graphics and digital sound. As with Sierra's other VGA remakes, the new control system did make some of the older puzzles slightly easier, however.



LEISURE SUIT LARRY V: PASSIONATE PATTI IN PURSUIT OF THE PULSATING PECTORALS

1991

(PC, Amiga, Mac)

Larry's first foray into the world of 256-colour point-and-click wonderfulness left fans asking 'but what about LSL IV?!?'. Another fun and funny adventure game from Al Lowe, which had the player controlling both Larry and his female counterpart, the very sexy Passionate Patti.

1 9 9 1



FREDDY PHARKAS: FRONTIER PHARMACIST

1993

(PC, Mac)

Al Lowe's popular alternative to Larry with more than enough adult-themed humour to keep the fanbase happy. The originality of this Wild West adventure, plus its memorable characters and storyline, warranted *Freddy Pharkas* as a classic in its own right.

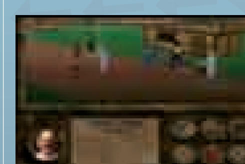


GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS

1993

(PC, Mac)

Jane Jensen's darkly themed gothic thriller appealed to an older audience and had all the right qualities to instantly garner a loyal fanbase. The puzzles were tough, the storyline was deep, and the popular response led to the development of a number of sequels over the years.



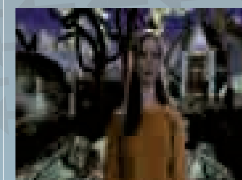
BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR

1993

(PC)

Based on the acclaimed fantasy series by Raymond E. Feist, *Betrayal At Krondor* added to an already stellar year of outings from Sierra. An engrossing story, real actors, a unique combat system plus a huge game world saw Dynamix's RPG receive praise from newcomers and Feist loyalists alike.

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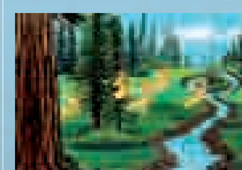


PHANTASMAGORIA

1995

(PC, Mac, Playstation, Sega Saturn)

Roberta Williams' drastic departure from the bright and good-natured *King's Quest* series, *Phantasmagoria* was Sierra's jump on the 'interactive movie' bandwagon. A dark horror game spread over seven CD-ROMs using recorded video of human actors throughout; this title definitely holds a place in Sierra's hall of fame.



THE REALM

1996

(PC)

A bold attempt at a massively multi-player online social experience years before the Internet was ready for it, *The Realm* was a great idea that suffered from being too much too soon. A shining example of how Sierra's brilliance in concepts and innovations was at times let down by technological limitations.

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KING'S QUEST VIII: MASK OF ETERNITY

1998

(PC)

Regarded as a major disappointment by many long-time *King's Quest* fans, the game was very poorly received. With an uninspired 3D engine, clumsy platformer action sequences plus the absence of the much of the 'love' that was seen in previous titles, *KQ VIII* was a clear indication that all was not well at Sierra headquarters.

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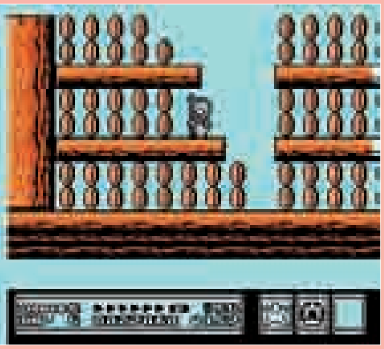
THE CLASSIC GAME



THE CLASSIC GAME

SUPER MARIO BROS 3

Super Mario Bros 3 blew up the whole Mario formula, invigorating proceedings with an intense frenzy of unique and unusual additions, a multitude of perplexing secrets, and so much shiny newness, it's almost unconnected to past games. It didn't so much take things to the next level, as destroy the old level and rebuild everything anew. John Szczepaniak relives his youth by playing this Classic Game.



» Discovering the flying Treasure Ship is incredibly difficult and requires mathematical planning. (Pictured is the Tanuki suit in statue form.)

IN THE KNOW



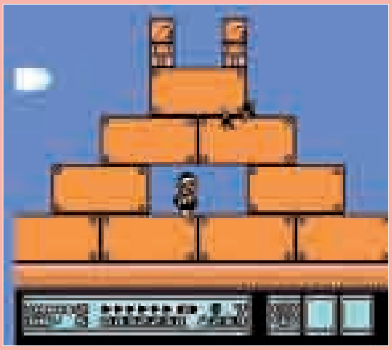
» **VERSION FEATURED:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

S*uper Mario Bros 3* was the first proper sequel in the *Super Mario* series. There had been the official Japanese sequel *SMB2*, later renamed *Lost Levels*, but despite a few additions (like deadly mushrooms) this was overly similar to the original (and reportedly Miyamoto had little involvement). Meanwhile the Western sequel was simply a rebranding of the Japanese FDS game *Yume Koujou Doki Doki Panic*, renamed *Super Mario USA*, which was developed by Fuji TV with Nintendo – with Miyamoto actually having a significant role in the design. Regardless though, it's not strictly regarded as a true *Mario* game. Which brings us to *SMB3*, a complete rethinking of the *Mario* formula along with numerous additions plus Shigeru Miyamoto and Takashi Tezuka in the designer's seat.

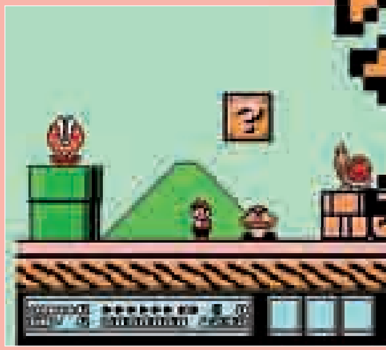
Along with the standard super-mushroom, fire-flower and invincibility star, *SMB3* featured ten additional items, including a frog-suit, Hammer-Bros suit, and power leaf which turns Mario into a racoon – in this state he's able to slow his descent, fly after gaining speed, and also destroy things with his tail. This became an iconic symbol of the game, even being prominently featured on the Western cover art. *SMB3* also expanded the canonical storyline, taking it beyond the standard rescue-the-princess affair. Instead you need to save the kings of seven different regions; Bowser has seven Koopa children which have stolen the kings' wands, and so need defeating.

But it's the power-ups which give *SMB3* much of its appeal, since the game-world is incredibly diverse and encourages free experimentation with the tools provided. There are many unique elements which only appear in one or two levels, and these deserve special

"FOR SOME, SUPER MARIO BROS 3 IS REGARDED EVEN MORE FONDLY THAN SUPER MARIO WORLD ON THE SNES"



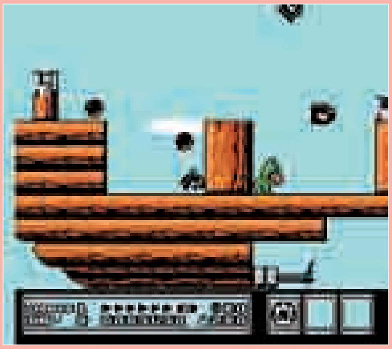
» The incredibly rare Hammer Bros suit; it protects Mario from ducks and also allows him to fling deadly hammers at enemies.



» *World 4* contains these giant levels, where the enemies are bigger than Mario. It adds a unique dynamic to proceedings.



» Swing your Racoon tail at just the right moment to defeat these fire snakes in *World 2*.



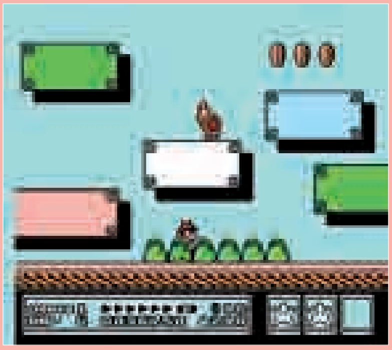
» Suddenly Mario thinks to himself, that somehow, attempting to take on the flying fortress in a Frog Suit wasn't such a good idea.

mention. The baby goombas which fall from the sky are infrequent; the angry sun which attacks is only found in two levels; the green Goomba boot (which protects against sharp objects) is only in world 5-3; red flying para-beetles are only in 5-6; while only a single world map has giant enemies. And there are still many other things with limited appearances! It gives the game a wonderful sense of experimentation, as if Miyamoto had simply gone crazy with ideas, trying out everything but never overusing them. It could be argued, when comparing it against other NES games, that each of the eight worlds in *SMB3* contains a multitude of elements which another developer would simply have taken one of, to use as a gimmick and build an entire game around. This is why *SMB3* has aged so well and is still brilliant today – it's constantly evolving and never feels repetitive; each world introduces something new to surprise you and few are likely to ever see everything it contains.

The game also has an abundance of tricky-to-discover secrets and techniques. Those annoying fire snakes in the desert levels can be killed quite easily using the racoon tail: simply wait for them to bounce close, and then the swing the tail to hit its head. Time things right and fiery scoundrel will be toast. Meanwhile find a chain-chomp, hang around for a while, and suddenly he breaks free lunging for Mario. You can also unlock bonus games, like one involving the matching of cards (if you acquire more than 80,000 points in a level and then are able to complete said level without dying). This involves flipping over cards and trying to match two of the same kind. The flying Treasure Ship bonus level is a little more difficult to find – you need to finish a level on even time (eg: 108), have a multiple of 11 as your number of coins (eg: 44), and the second digit from the right in your score must match the digits of your coins (following our previous coin example, 21,840). Then of course there are the pipes. Oh Danny boy, the pipes, the pi... (Just get on with the feature! – Ed). Green pipes are synonymous with the *Mario* series, tempting players with the possibility of secret areas. Press down on one and you may be sucked into a room filled with coins and lives. Over the years players have learned to instinctively try each and every single pipe, on the remote chance that it might lead to something exciting. This is one of the things so exciting about retro games – surreal landscapes of wonderment, where everything has the potential to conceal magical secrets.

There are also sections where you can hide behind scenery, by holding down while standing on a white block until you fall through. Near the end of World 1-3, doing this allows you to run to the end and acquire a warp whistle. Three such whistles are hidden in the game, including one near the end of World 1's fortress, and another in World 2. The discovery of a whistle was even featured in the Fred Savage film *The Wizard*, which was little more than a vehicle to advertise *SMB3* before its US release. Still, it generated plenty of excitement and over the years *SMB3* sold around 17 million copies – more when you consider compilations.

For some, *SMB3* is regarded even more fondly than *Super Mario World* on the SNES. While excellent, *SMW* was more sedate and cut-back, with some people being disappointed at the lack of so many separate items to use. The paltry four available (mushrooms, flowers, stars, and feathers) made it seem as if the gameplay, even with the presence of Yoshi, had taken a step backwards. Whatever your preference though, it can't be denied that *SMB3* is not only one of the best games in the series but also the most extravagant (with follow-ups making the gameplay more streamlined). We're anticipating this coming to the Virtual Console and when it does, nothing, not even the need to buy moustache wax, will stop us from downloading it.



» If you stand on white blocks and hold down, Mario will eventually go into the background scenery as shown here.



» Toad, a magical mushroom, explains the benefits of and espouses the drugs culture. A far away land? Like, far out, man.

UNBRIDLED INSANITY

Nintendo games, especially the *Mario* titles, can influence people in some rather strange ways – it can even drive them mad. Possibly. In our travels to find all things retro we stumbled across a Japanese pixel-artist known as Masao, who creates highly-stylised art based predominantly on Nintendo games and systems. A lot of his work features Mario (*Mario 3* images shown here), but whatever he does, it's all slightly deranged and more than a little disturbing. But the good kind of disturbing, like waking up in Reno blindfolded, handcuffed, and naked. All of Masao's art portrays the characters as excessively butch and coarse (check out his Pikachu renditions!), and this gives Mario a more mature serious look, while still maintaining the same surreal atmosphere and surroundings. We want to see a game based on these images. If you can handle the caustic injection of lunacy directly into your brainstem, check out: www5c.biglobe.ne.jp/~kurekure/





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUPER MARIO BROS
SYSTEMS: NES
YEAR: 1985

LEGEND OF ZELDA
SYSTEMS: NES
YEAR: 1986

MARIO ALL STARS
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1993





» Inside the Mammoth Cave system in Kentucky, where Will Crowther was inspired to set his game.



» An entrance way to the real Colossal Cave.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

ORIGIN OF THE TEXT ADVENTURE GAME

THE TEXT-BASED ADVENTURE WAS THE CRUCIBLE IN WHICH RPG, ACTION, ADVENTURE, VIRTUAL WORLD AND EXPLORATION GAMES WERE FORGED. SEVEN GENERATIONS OF COMPUTER AND VIDEOGAMES HAVE BEEN TEMPERED IN THE FIRES OF ONE SINGLE TITLE, KNOWN SIMPLY AS ADVENTURE. WILL CROWTHER AND DON WOODS TELL US ABOUT THE GENESIS OF THE FIRST EVER TEXT ADVENTURE GAME.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** N/A

» **DEVELOPER:** WILL CROWTHER & DON WOODS

» **RELEASED:** 1975

» **GENRE:** TEXT ADVENTURE

» **FORMAT:** FORTRAN ON A DEC PDP-10

Throughout the Sixties and early Seventies, the notion of playing games on a computer had been toyed with, mainly by student hackers who found themselves with after-hours access to the behemoth systems of the day. Although Will Crowther may not have been a student, he unlocked the potential of the DEC PDP computer at MIT and, although he didn't know it at the time, ushered in a whole new generation of computer entertainment.

A WORLD WITHOUT GAMES

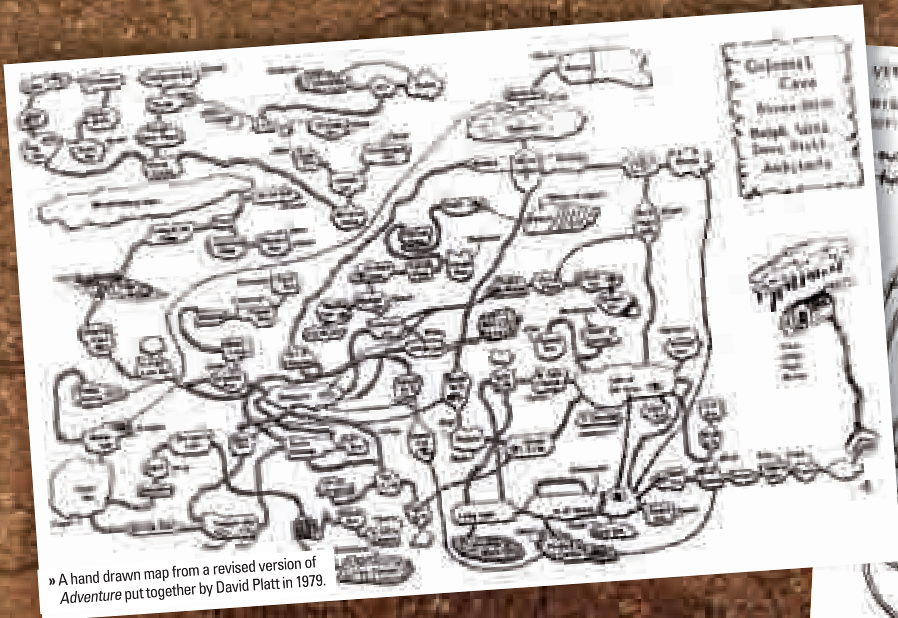
For Will Crowther and Don Woods, there was initially very little inspiration to suggest computers even had a future in the entertainment realm.

"I played all sorts of games, but there wasn't much in the way of computer games. Certainly no graphics. *Tic Tac Toe* and *Othello* were on a computer, and some solitaire games and bad chess. I'd experienced a manual role playing game, where we mostly made up the rules as we went along." Crowther explains about his early experiences of computers.

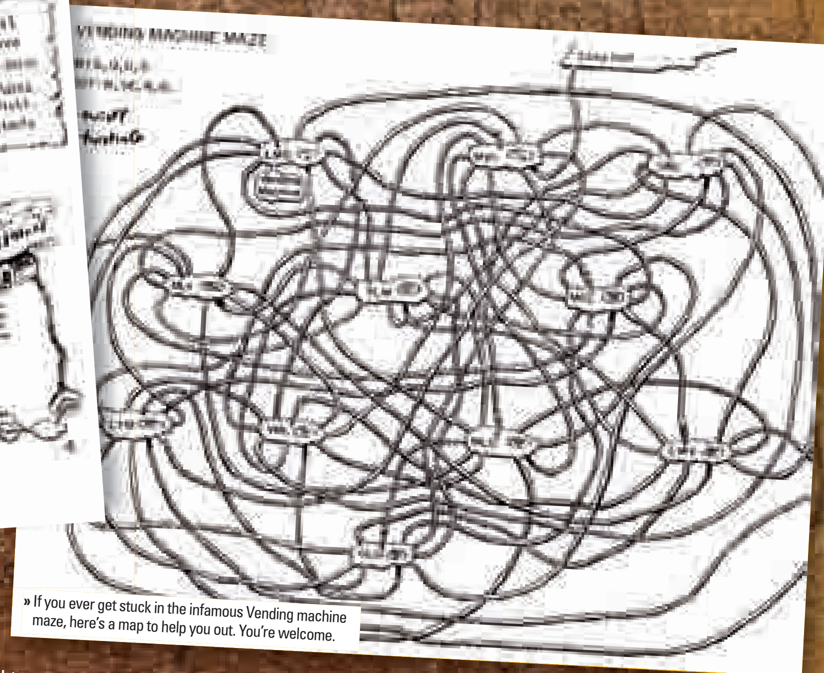
"At MIT in the late Fifties computers were huge, and you either submitted runs (no fun there) or took the whole machine, but only a few could ever do that. My first job was working on a program to track incoming enemy airplanes (a jamming radar). There was a display, and the operator had to figure out from the patterns on the screen where the airplanes were. It was a game, of sorts!", laughs Crowther.

Although the two men had yet to meet, Don Woods had enjoyed a very similar introduction to the slowly merging worlds of computers and games. He told us about his own unique perspective on what made computers fun before the games appeared:

"I got interested in computers in the early Sixties, because my father was employed designing them. I would



» A hand drawn map from a revised version of *Adventure* put together by David Platt in 1979.



» If you ever get stuck in the infamous Vending machine maze, here's a map to help you out. You're welcome.

occasionally help him double check wiring diagrams. Yes, computers used real wires in those days, not integrated circuits! I wrote my first computer program at the age of 12, which was pretty much unheard of in that era. I didn't really think of them as "entertainment", unless you mean the sort of entertainment provided by toys like Lego blocks, for example," said Woods.

A valid point about what drew people to dabble with computers in the first place: it was the hardware, which provided the games and the puzzles. Deciphering how these new concepts in engineering and mathematics worked was enough of a challenge to encourage people like Crowther and Woods to explore the endless possibilities offered by computers.

The educational benefits of computer games were also something Crowther had seen the potential of, and provided the beginnings of his major work in designing a virtual world.

"I'd written some simple code for my kids. A program to help them learn typing, and a simple addition game, where if they could add two digits it would ring the Teletype bell. This was supposed to amuse them," recalls Crowther.

Don Woods' experiences as he got to know more about the new world of computer programming drew a distinct parallel with Crowther's.

"There were computer games" recalls Woods, "but I hadn't encountered them when I started programming. It was a year or so later before I ran across some games on a time-sharing system, like an all-text golf game. Certainly I'd always enjoyed playing card games and board games. I wrote some game programs for the computers my father was building – things like a roulette game and a program to generate three-dimensional mazes, but again, these were all done with text, not graphics."

WELCOME TO ADVENTURE!

By 1972, Will Crowther was working at Bolt, Beranek and Newman on the ARPANet project: the forerunner to the Internet. In order to create a more immersive computer game for his daughters to play, Crowther had the notion of creating a simulation of the Mammoth Cave system in Kentucky using data he (a keen caver) had personally mapped. This 'virtual' cave was then inhabited by a plethora of dungeons, dragons and puzzles.

"It was always intended to be a game, not a virtual tour. I needed a backdrop, and I was cartographer for the Cave Research Foundation at the time. It seemed a good match. The role playing dungeons of the time were usually set underground, so it seemed right." explains Crowther, who evidently harbours a talent for storytelling as much as programming. He continues:

"I wrote in Fortran on a PDP-1, using a remote Teletype over a phone line as a console. I never had any space problems, but then I was on a machine with virtual memory, and speed was never an issue. I had no idea what the size was, and didn't care. I never distributed anything," he recalls.

Showing simply as "ADVENT" on the BBN mainframe, Crowther's game began to steadily spread across the fledgling network (which consisted of several hundred computers). Network security and rogue programs were hardly an issue in 1975 and the game simply 'appeared' overnight on many machines. One such installation caught the eye of Don Woods.

"I'd never seen anything like it. There were a few "natural language" based

> "IT WAS VERY POPULAR AND BECAME NOTORIOUS FOR BRINGING UNIVERSITY COMPUTERS TO A HALT BECAUSE SO MANY COPIES OF IT WERE RUNNING ON THEIR MAIN FRAME!"
> WILL CROWTHER



» The DEC PDP-1 computer Will Crowther first built an entire cave system inside of.



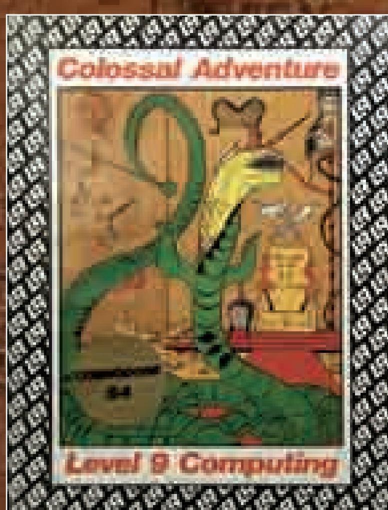
» Don Woods. The man who went back into the cave and found the treasure.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

"I DIDN'T KNOW CROWTHER. A FELLOW GRADUATE STUDENT … RAN ACROSS CROWTHER'S PROGRAM ON THE MED CENTRE'S COMPUTER. I HAVE NO IDEA WHO INSTALLED IT THERE" DON WOODS

programs, such as ELIZA, but nothing that simulated an actual environment. So I was quite fascinated by it, but immediately began thinking of ways to make it more interesting by adding more puzzles instead of having the game being mostly exploration," explains Woods, still excited about the first time he saw the application of computer programming he'd been looking for all his life. He told us how he put the ARPANet to work in locating the inspired Dungeon Master who had captured his imagination.

"I didn't know Crowther. A fellow graduate student at Stanford who had a job at the Medical Centre ran across Crowther's program on their computer. I have no idea who installed it there. The program mentioned "Willie Crowther" as the person to contact with questions, so when I decided I wanted to modify *Adventure* I sent mail to "crowther@xxx" for all computers on the Arpanet. I got several "failed mail" responses, but eventually got a reply from Crowther." Wood's revised version was considerably more Tolkienian, offering more immersive gameplay, elaborate puzzles and a calculated scoring system. It was this version most people (many of whom went on to found the adventure game industry) knew and loved.



» It took Level-9 Computing over a year to fit *Adventure* onto the 8-bit cassettes, with enough room left over for 70 extra locations.

Despite becoming popularised as "Colossal Cave Adventure", that was a name which appeared further down the line in one of the many reprises the game saw over the years. Crowther told us about his original title for the game, which wound up christening the entire genre, instead.

"Colossal Cave was not my name. There is a real Colossal cave, part of the Mammoth cave system. A big cave like that has lots of names; Colossal cave is part of Flint Ridge, which is part of Mammoth cave, which has 350 miles of surveyed passage. Working the other way, Bedquilt is a small part of Colossal cave, with perhaps ten miles of passage. The *Adventure* game is set in Bedquilt, and all of the realistic cave features are part of Bedquilt. So I would have called it "Bedquilt Cave Adventure". But someone else picked Colossal. Oh well. Bedquilt is just a hole in the ground where water disappears, so maybe Colossal isn't such a bad name!"

TWISTY LITTLE PASSAGEWAYS

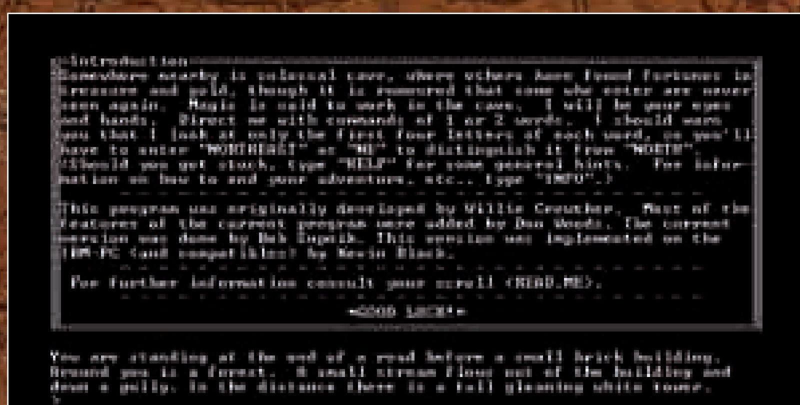
There were reports of cavers who'd heard about this remarkable computer application and sought out *Adventure* to see for themselves. Several have remarked that Crowther's virtual cave was such a precise representation of the Bedquilt section of the Mammoth system that, even though they'd never been to the actual cave before, they were able to find their way around after playing *Adventure*. Crowther told us more…

"It was accurate, but not complex. As part of my role as cartographer, I had produced a large and accurate map of a small but complex part of Mammoth Cave, which featured seven levels, stacked one approximately above the other. Wherever they crossed there was usually a junction. I described the junctions in the game and gave the player a choice of directions to follow to the next junction. I've been told that at least one player who'd never been in that part of the cave recognised the junctions and the passages between them." Although Crowther takes it well in his stride, this is no small achievement and one that has rarely been replicated even today.

» *Adventure* was first distributed among members of DECUS: a volunteer run user group founded by pioneering computer manufacturer, Digital Entertainment Corporation.

The foundations upon which Don was building might not have realised their full potential at that point, but they were solid. Woods could see beyond the passageways and tunnels to the fantastical world waiting to break through. Initially he realised the code needed some alteration before it would be ready to bring his new world to life.

"It wasn't all that difficult a process. The overall structure was there. I rewrote a lot of Will's program because I wanted to be able to do more complex things without having to write lots of special-case code. In Will's program, there was a data file that specified things like "moving in direction X from location Y takes you to location Z". But if there was anything



» *Adventure's* instruction page written by the Dungeon Master himself, Willie Crowther.

HUNT THE WUMPUS

Not so much as a forerunner to *Adventure* as a component inspiration, the historically significant *Hunt The Wumpus* was a hide-and-seek text-based puzzle game. Its creator, Gregory Yob, had seen a variety of *Battleship*-styled computer games from People's Computer Company and envisaged a game environment shaped like a dodecahedron (as he had once built a kite in that formation and was partial to the shape) divided up into rooms. Each room adjoined other rooms, or featured a game-ending device like a pit or the mysterious Wumpus creature.

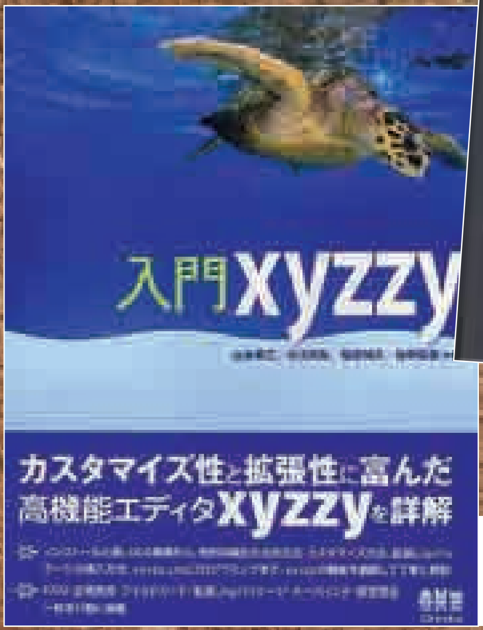
The player would navigate their way through the system of rooms and work out where the Wumpus was hiding. Shooting an arrow into a room before entering had one of two effects: either the Wumpus was killed (if present in the room), or it was startled and changed rooms, possibly killing the player in the process.

Sadly, Gregory Yob died in 2005 in San Paolo, where his head was placed in neurosuspension at the Alcor cryogenics facility.

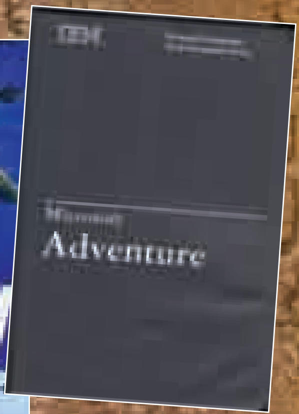




» Winners of the 1981 Software Toolworks IBM port of *Adventure* were given a code, and awarded this Certificate of Wizardness by the company.



» The magic word "xyzzy" has even migrated as far as Japan. Here it lends its name to a Japanese text editor for Windows.



» The original disk box of Microsoft's 1979 PC, TRS-80 and Apple II versions of *Adventure*.

special about it, such as "only if the crystal bridge exists", Will's data file just specified, "command requires special code N", and the program then contained special code to test the condition.

I wanted to be able to build those things, and more complex puzzles, into the game without having to write special code for every situation. So I spent a while redesigning the format of the data file, and rewriting the program to use the new data file. Then I was able to start adding more puzzles." After Wood's redesign, *Adventure* took on a whole new life and was more actively promoted by the DEC user's community known as DECUS. The game spread like wildfire and its popularity was immediately redoubled. Crowther recalls the reaction he saw to the new improved *Adventure*.

"I think Don did a great job. My notion of winning the game was just getting all the treasures back out of the cave, whereas Don realised it would be more fun to have a running score. Good idea! It was very popular and became notorious for bringing university computers to a halt because so many copies of it were running on their main frame!"

TREASURE FROM THE CAVE

For all their hard work and revolutionary thinking, *Adventure* never really made any money for its two creators, despite going on to become a corner stone for all forms of explorative, virtual world games that followed. Yet neither of them seems in the least perturbed by the matter, as Crowther blithely explains.

"We happily set it free. We made a little money by endorsing one of the versions for the PC – I think they felt a little guilty. I suppose today someone would patent it, and demand royalties from every game. Back then, such an attitude would probably have killed it," says Crowther, content with having provided so many hours of entertainment to other hackers like himself. Woods is of a similar opinion.

"We made some small amounts and got a few free dinners over the years. Will and I received some modest royalties for our endorsement of a version published by Software Toolworks, but for the most part we simply set it loose and made it available for free. I had a grand time building the game." smiles Woods.

It feels somehow reassuring to know that such a massively significant contribution to what became a horrendously avaricious industry began and ended with beneficent motives. If today's industry leaders could only follow the trail of breadcrumbs laid down by pioneers such as Will Crowther and Don Woods, they might find their way out of the maze of twisty little passageways and once again see the sun.

> "THE FOUNDATIONS UPON WHICH DON [WOODS] WAS BUILDING MIGHT NOT HAVE REALISED THEIR FULL POTENTIAL AT THAT POINT, BUT THEY WERE SOLID"

Special thanks to Rick Adams for providing pictures. For more info on Adventure, check out Rick's page here: www.rickadams.org/adventure/

WHAT'S THE MAGIC WORD?

Adventure has not only influenced countless other genres, but aspects of the game have permeated the entire hacker culture. The most significant is the magic word "xyzzy". Despite much conjecture, its origin is remarkably simple. Will told us more:

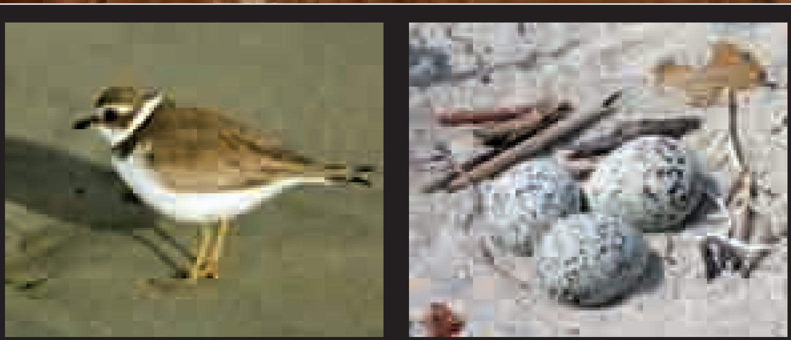
"I wanted a unique magic word, and was considering working for Xerox at the time so words with letters near the end of the alphabet came to mind." Next on the list is "plugh" – the meaning of which has been subjected to even more speculation than xyzzy. A popular belief is that, due to the nature of its use in the game, it's a truncated version of the word "plughole". Will's answer put an end to that theory:

"What's a plughole? Did Don make up that one? I like the spelling."

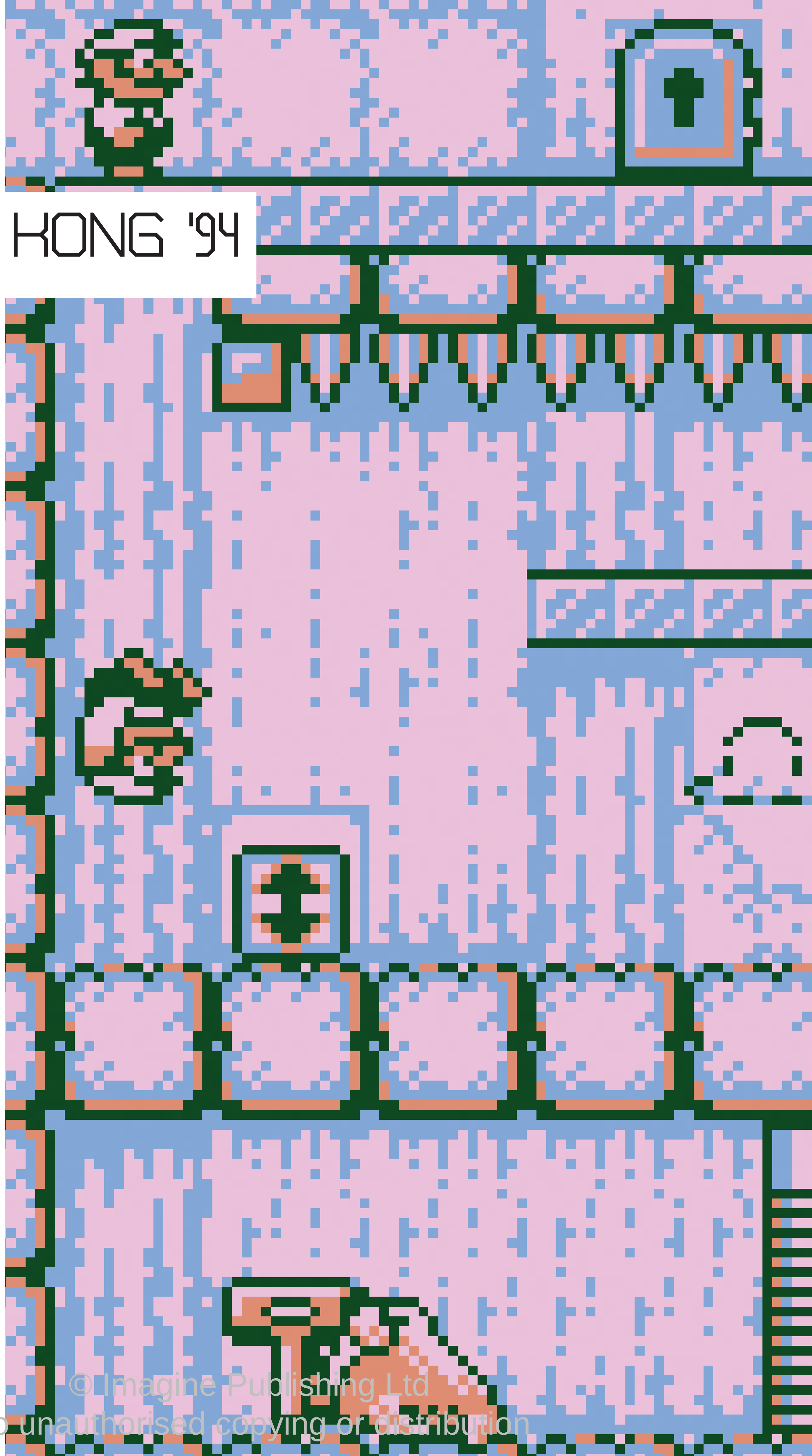
Over to you, Don. "I'm afraid this may be lost to the mists then, because I felt sure "plugh" was in Will's version of the game."

Oh well. That only leaves the mysterious "plover" and its enigmatic eggs. This is one of Don's.

"I'm not sure where I originally encountered the phrase "a gem as big as a plover's egg"; presumably in a book or movie, but it obviously stuck with me and I used it to describe one of the treasures, which led to calling the room the "Plover Room". As that part of the cave evolved, a magic word was needed, and the choice seemed obvious."



» The Plover: a wading bird that lives on the shoreline and has a short bill and tail and long pointed wings (Encarta).



DONKEY KONG '94

MAKE THAT DONKEY DANCE!



- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SUPER GAME BOY
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

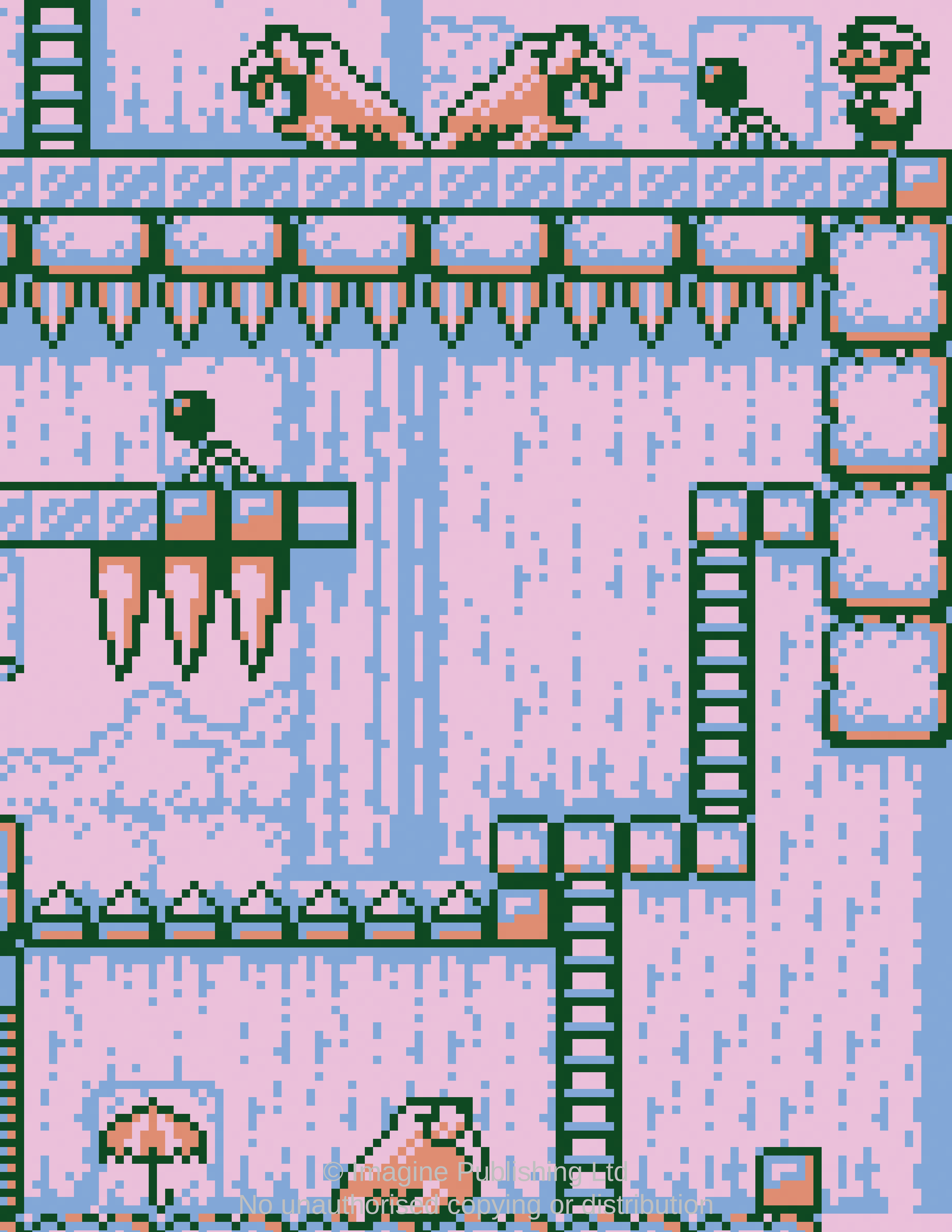
HISTORY



Tormenting large stubborn primates is a fun thing to do. Their giant eyes rolling around in frustration as you avoid what they throw, their intense jumping and screaming and slapping of chests as if locked into some kind of robotronic dance. They are the ultimate animal to tangle with, and the most satisfying to thwart. Of course it's very illegal (as opposed to only slightly illegal and therefore permissible), but super-illegality doesn't make it any less fun. Bothering the smelly brutes is awesome. Hence it falls to Miyamoto (a man with an almost fetish-like penchant for teasing apes – metaphorically that is!), and his great creation *Donkey Kong*.

Donkey Kong '94 (the numerical moniker being used by magazines of the era) on the monochrome Game Boy was significant for several reasons. It was the first game to feature Super Game Boy compatibility – a mostly unpopular attempt to allow otherwise monochrome titles to be played in colour on a SNES. It was also the first official traditional update to the series in over a decade (we're ignoring *Donkey Kong 3* since it wasn't as good as either of the previous games and changed the mechanics too much, while *Donkey Kong Country* is also vastly different).

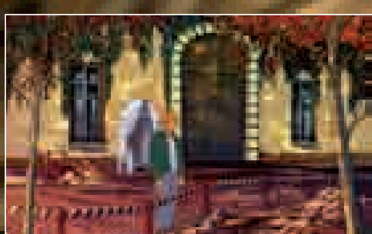
In retrospect it's obvious that *Donkey Kong '94* was literally as perfect an update as anyone could have hoped for; arguably nothing could be or even needed improving. Things start slowly, with a delightfully quaint and simplified recreation of the arcade original, but soon there are tricky puzzles which showcase just how versatile this new "jumpman" is. Mario can do handstands (even while walking) and summersaults, throw the original's hammers high in the air and catch them again, while also using arrow blocks to create temporary bridges and ladders. Despite all these additions, its arcade origins aren't lost and gameplay never becomes overworked; the mechanics feel like a logical update to the 1981 original. So, what are you waiting for? Go out there and slap that Donkey to make it dance! DANCE!



THE MAKING OF...

BROKEN SWORD

Ten years before Dan Brown sparked controversy with The Da Vinci Code, Revolution Software's Broken Sword explored the legend of the Knights Templar. Director Charles Cecil tells David Crookes just why he decided to create this historical adventure



» *Broken Sword* was ported onto the Game Boy Advance in 2002.



IT WOULD be wrong to suggest that point-and-click adventure games are dead. Better to say that amid the scorching driving games, frantic first-person shooters and soil-your-pants survival horrors is a genre of gaming that has been sound asleep – with no developer appearing all that willing to wake it up.

Around ten years ago, however, they were hugely popular. And among the games causing a stir was *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars*, a title created by Charles Cecil, boss of the highly acclaimed developer Revolution Software. Indeed, such was *Broken Sword*'s popularity it has spawned three sequels.

The original, *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars* introduced US law graduate George Stobbart and French journalist Nico Collard and took the player on an adventure which transcended the globe and drew in more than its fair share of cults, murder and conspiracies, all laden thick with the hand of the Knights Templar. In what, in hindsight, looks like a precursor to Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code, Broken Sword* was ahead of its time.

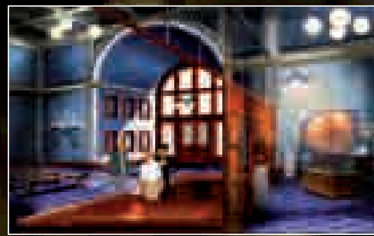
Charles was certainly a fan of adventure games and had knocked out three text-only titles – *Inca Curse* and *Espionage Island* in 1981 and *Ship Of Doom* a year later – while studying mechanical engineering at the University of Manchester.

They were sold via student friend Matt Wallace's games firm, Artic Computing, and encouraged Charles to establish Paragon Programming, a gaming development company that worked with US Gold, upon his graduation in 1985. Two years later, he became US Gold's Software Development Manager before being approached by Activision to manage its European Development Studio.

But then, in 1990, he decided to go back to his roots and he set up Revolution Software.

At this time, Charles was taken by the point-and-click interface mastered in 1990 by LucasArts' *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, a classic game with a fantastic script.

He realised the possibilities that lay ahead and took on board the principles of point-and-click for *Lure Of The Temptress*, Revolution's debut title. The game took two years to make and cost between £20,000 and £30,000.



» George Stobbart often struggled to get any sense from the French police.



» To mark the tenth anniversary of *Broken Sword* this year, Astraware joined forces with Revolution to produce a version of the first *Broken Sword* for PalmOS and Windows Mobile devices. "We always dreamed of writing the game on a device that would reach beyond hardcore gamers, with the emphasis on intelligent, cerebral gameplay, rather than the requirement for manual dexterity," says Charles.



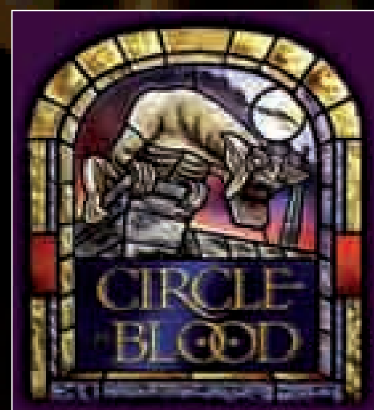
Charles, as director, constructed it with precision, combining elements of fantasy and comedy to such perfection that Virgin Interactive Entertainment was only too happy to snap it up, publishing it for the Atari ST, PC and Amiga.

"*Lure Of The Temptress* was certainly the beginning of what would become the *Broken Sword* story," says Charles. *Temptress* was followed up by science fiction adventure *Beneath A Steel Sky* in 1994 for the PC and Amiga. And then Charles read the controversial book *Holy Blood And The Holy Grail*.

Authors Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln argued there was evidence that Jesus married Mary Magdalene. The book claimed the pair had one or more children who had emigrated to what is now the south of France and that a secret society called the Priory of Sion was set up to keep the 'truth' alive, creating the Knights Templar, their military and financial wing.

Charles became fascinated by the conspiracy theories and he decided his next game would be based upon them.

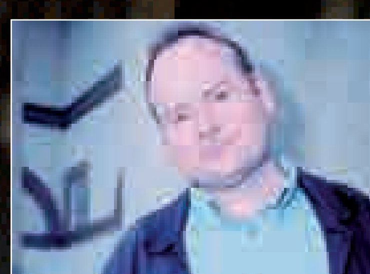
"I was looking for a subject which could bring in elements of humour but was predominantly based upon drama," he continues. "The most successful adventure games at the time were centred on humour, like *Monkey Island*, but I wanted to depart from that, to create a game that had good pacing and a storyline that seemed real and involved. That's why I felt the Knight Templars would be a great subject. It felt fresh – this was ten years ago when it was hard to find details of the Knight Templars and few people had heard of them. After reading *Holy Blood And The Holy Grail* I felt there was enough history with the Templars to make it a good subject on which to base a game."



» *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars* was called *Circle Of Blood* in America.

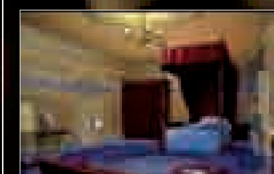


» The colourful, cartoon-style graphics attracted much acclaim from reviewers.



» Charles Cecil is the co-founder and managing director of Revolution Software.

IN THE KNOW



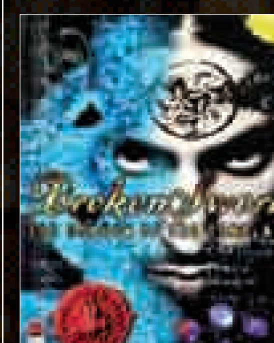
» **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

» **DEVELOPER:** REVOLUTION SOFTWARE

» **RELEASED:** 1996 PC AND PLAYSTATION, 2002 GBA

» **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

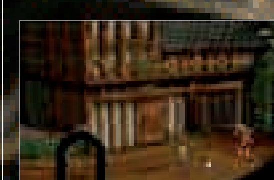
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £4.99 (IN PACK WITH *BROKEN SWORD 2*)



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LURE OF THE TEMPTRESS
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC
YEAR: 1992

BENEATH A STEEL SKY
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMIGA CD32, PC
YEAR: 1994



THE MAKING OF...

BROKEN SWORD

POINTING THE WAY

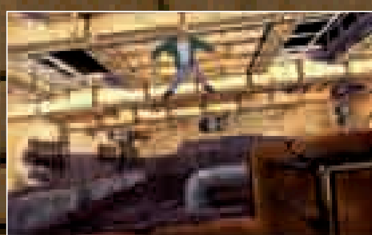
Charles Cecil once infamously said point-and-click adventure games were dead. And he indeed dropped it as a concept in the series' third game, *The Sleeping Dragon*. So why has he resurrected it for *The Angel Of Death*? He says: "I brought it back for *Broken Sword 4* after deciding to give people a choice. And what I meant when I said point-and-click was dead was that the genre was dead and not the interface.

"Classic point-and-click games will not come back but in *Broken Sword 4*, we have a point-and-click element. Some people love direct control and others do not.

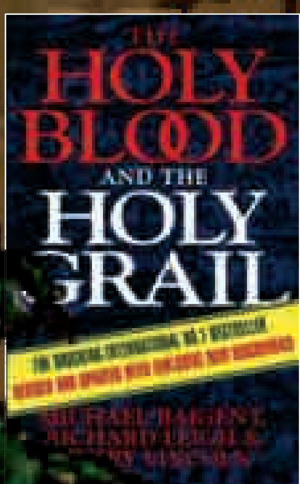
"There was a lot of ill-feeling with *Broken Sword 3* not having point-and-click and I could see their point. I like point-and-click myself and with *Broken Sword 4* we have achieved a middle ground."



» Shedding his trademark jeans for a spell, George becomes a bogus doctor in his quest for the truth.



» Was George hiding from Nico? No, it was just a daring stunt – one of many George had to face.



» The controversial book that started a thousand careers and led to the creation of both *The Da Vinci Code* and *Broken Sword*, was *The Holy Blood And The Holy Grail*.



» *Broken Sword* is full of reference to the Knights Templar myth.

Once he had finished the book, he began to scribble down some ideas with scriptwriters Dave Cummins and Jonathan Howard and he decided he wanted to continue with the point-and-click theme of his two earlier efforts. His desire was to create a cinematic style for the new game while keeping faith with the traditional structure of adventure titles. By doing this, he mused, he would avoid going down the path that the glut of interactive movies had trodden in the early 1990s.

"When *Broken Sword* came out, we were riding on the back of these interactive movies," he says. "They were a disaster. The people knocking them out were being blinded – they wanted to rub shoulders with movie stars and producers and the gaming elements were lost. They were out of touch with games. Of course, I am interested in film script writing and I felt then and still do that there can be parallels with games. I felt we needed to learn from the movies with *Broken Sword* but not mimic them. It was my intention to make *Broken Sword* cinematic, with great gameplay."

After making his final decision upon the theme, Charles jumped on a plane to conduct a spot of research. "I visited Paris, going around the catacombs and checking out locations and sights," he said. "It's important to get references like this and I've done it with all of the games I have written. In actual fact, each game I have produced has reflected areas of life I'm interested in or place I have been to.

"For instance, *Broken Sword 3* was set in the Congo. I was brought up there and had to leave under the bloody revolution so to create a game with that setting was very personal to me."

Once he arrived back, he began to formulate the way the game would run and, as with his early games, he decided again to take full control – "someone has to have a vision in their head, of the characters, the story."

His first decision was to make the game believable. "Believability is key and is preferable to out and out realism," he says. "The characters had to be motivated, as we would expect in real life, and everything – right down to the smaller touches like the background lighting – had to be dramatic but not out of place.

"The same was true of the puzzles. We had to be very careful and so we went through lots of them, seeing which ones would be fun. These drive the story on, providing rewards as the players goes along, so we had to get them right."



» Despite the sinister world George was heading into, it sure took him to some nice places.

"I'M NEVER HAPPY WITH MY GAMES; I ALWAYS LOOK AT HOW THEY'RE RECEIVED" CHARES CECIL

Charles wrote the cutscenes and dialogue first and approached Australian composer Barrington Pheloung (known for creating the theme to *Inspector Morse*) for the music. "Our approach was not dissimilar to a film writer's approach to a movie. We got the cutscenes and dialogue done early in the process and from then on, we tweaked it. One of the earliest decisions was to make sure the player felt as involved as possible, so we made sure any cutscenes were short and came at the right time."

One of the most important things, however, was to get the first scenes right. Not only is this vital to draw the player into the adventure, but Revolution created many demos for magazine coverdiscs allowing the first scene to be played for free – a bad introduction and the whole project would have gone to waste.

Charles created an explosive opening scene. With the opening titles out of the way, the cameras pans down through the Paris skyline and on to the street, revealing George having a coffee at a quiet Parisian cafe. A man dressed as a clown bounds in, places an accordion on a seat inside the cafe and dashes out. The accordion contains a massive bomb, which explodes, leaving a quizzical George to dust himself down and use the remainder of his vacation to investigate the crime by travelling to Ireland, Spain, Syria and Scotland.

"There are two ways to start a game. You can give lots of background about a character and what he or she is doing or you can start in a way that is outside the player's control and that's what I wanted," Charles continues. "I thought that since the player controlled the character and associated with him or her, that I could afford to start a game without giving away a great deal about that character. So in the first scene, I didn't want a long exposition. George is drawn into the plot unwillingly, having been caught up in an explosion and he wants to do the right thing in finding out what was behind it. Nico comes in after around ten minutes – just as we wanted from the beginning."

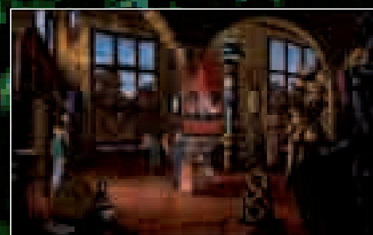
"BROKEN SWORD 3 WAS SET IN THE CONGO. I WAS BROUGHT UP THERE AND HAD TO LEAVE UNDER THE BLOODY REVOLUTION, SO IT MEANT A LOT TO ME" CHARLES CECIL

So why was Nico created? Charles explains: "When I created the game, I decided that there would be two characters – a man and a woman – and the idea was that they would be our protagonists, exchanging thoughts and ideas between themselves, helping to drive the game along. It meant we didn't need to have lengthy one-man dialogues or the need for 30 minutes of cutscenes. As for why I made George American and Nico French, I wanted to appeal to the US and European markets. Of course, it's also more exotic for an Englishman like myself to write a storyline involving people of different nationalities. I thought George would help us corner the American market but, in the end, the game did particularly well in Europe, especially Germany."

George's character is soon established. His sarcastic and passive nature marks him out as a friendly, curious, yet rather average, intelligent American with a penchant for wearing jeans and ensuring his blond hair is short at the back and long at the front. Nico is a beautiful brunette, more forthright and driven, yet also sarcastic and, in George's eyes anyway, too friendly with André Lobineau, a French history-scholar.

As the game progresses, it becomes obvious that there could be a spark of chemistry between George and Nico. Charles laughs: "There was a question over Nico being George's love interest. We could very easily have had them having sex but that would have ruined the relationship between these people."

George was voiced by US actor Rolf Saxon and he has continued in that role for all four games. Actress Rachel Atkins voiced Nico in the debut game but she was replaced by Flaminia Cinque for



» A historical trip such as the one on which George embarked would inevitably see him pop into a museum.

Broken Sword II: The Smoking Mirror, Sarah Crook in *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* and Katherine Pageon in the latest instalment, *Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death.*

Why use so many different actresses? "I've never had a bad Nico, but I've never had one I've been happy with," Charles explains. "I have been pleased with Rolf Saxon's George, though. He has made the part his own."

With a final cost of £1 million, *Broken Sword* was certainly not cheap. But not everything was rosy. The game may have been a phenomenal success on the PC but its debut on the PlayStation was less successful. The lack of a mouse meant control was difficult.

"My one big regret was the PlayStation version," says Charles. "No one thought that it would sell, so we kept it like the PC version. In hindsight, I think if we had introduced direct control in this game, it would have been enormous. But to be honest, I'm never happy with my games and I always look at how they are being received."

But with reviewers gushing in their praise on *Broken Sword*'s debut he had every reason to be happy.

SPECIAL THANKS TO Mobygames.com for several important images

DA BROKEN SWORD

The similarities between *Broken Sword* and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* are startling.

So what does Charles think about Dan Brown making billions of pounds from a similar concept to *Broken Sword* – American man, French woman, Knights Templar, religious conspiracies...

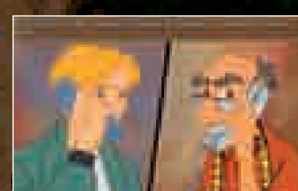
"*The Da Vinci Code* is very similar to *Broken Sword*," says Charles. "There's an American guy and French girl; it involves the Knight Templars. I would be flattered to think Dan Brown had played *Broken Sword* – we had both, however, read *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*."

Could a *Broken Sword* film be on the cards? "We get approached about making a *Broken Sword* film from time to time," he reveals. "But if it was a bad film, it would kill the franchise. I would only be interested if I could see it would be a good job."

Such is Charles' fascination with the Knights Templar, he was called to write a high level précis for *The Da Vinci Code* game.



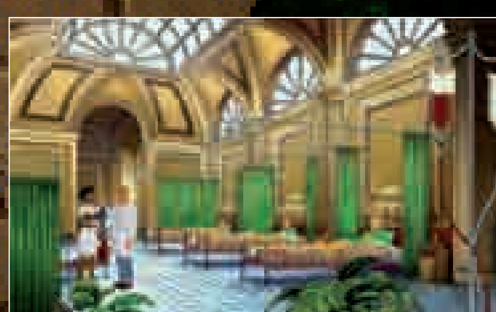
» George's reaction on the news that Broken Sword 3 would be in 3D was priceless….



» Cutscenes such as these - in which George talks on the phone - help to drive the narrative.



» The quest for turth took George to all sorts of strange places…



» George in a hospital, which looks a world apart from a British NHS one.



» George meets some of Paris' colourful life.

遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

FULL OF EASTERN

NINTENDO'S FIRST GAME EVER… BUT IT'S NOT COMPUTER OR CONSOLE BASED

HANAFUDA

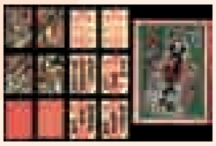
IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** VARIOUS
» **DEVELOPER:** JAPANESE PEOPLE
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MULBERRY TREE BARK
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10
» **ALSO AVAILABLE FOR:** CONSOLES, PCS, VINYL, PAPER
» **CAN'T IMPORT?** THEN WHY NOT TRY STRIP POKER

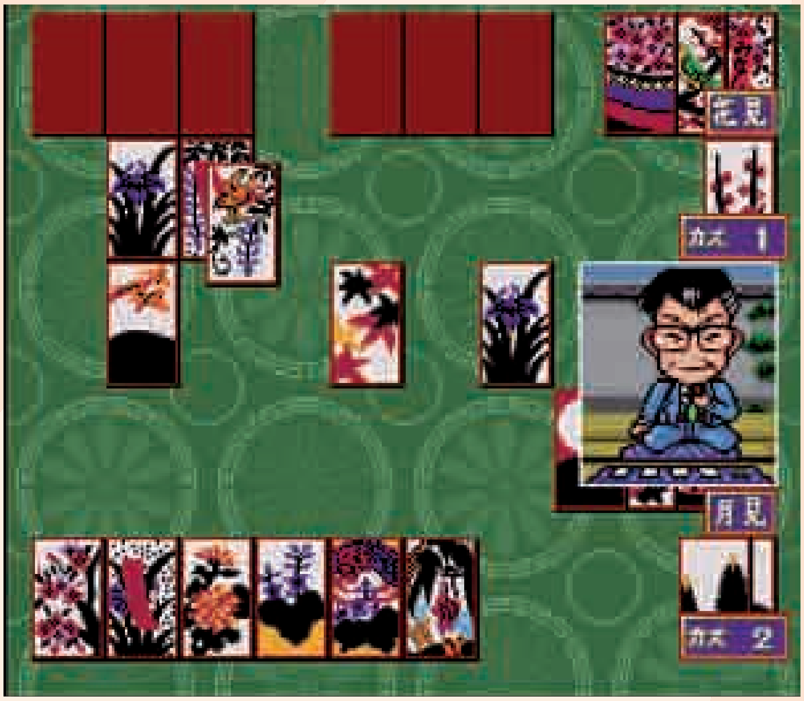
Poker shares several characteristics with Hanafuda (matching sets, gambling affiliations, and so on), plus potential nakedness makes everything more fun, so this is the perfect, hilarious alternative. Of course it's not quite as guffaw inducing as Strip Twister (an office favourite), but when you're feeling lethargic (or simply not up to having your face pressed into someone else's bosom) Strip Poker is a worthy alternative.





Interesting fact
There are several unique Japanese card games. Two sound similar to Hanafuda: there's Harifuda (which involves seven sets numbered 1-6), and Kabufuda (similar to blackjack, except the goal is nine, not 21).

Everyone has a vague notion that Nintendo first got into gaming around a century ago, thanks to some kind of popular Japanese playing card. But do you really know what it involves? More importantly, have you ever played it? Poychi Robo gets loaded on saké and explains all.



» *Super Hanafuda* on Nintendo's SNES. The latest videogame version of Hanafuda is Koi Koi on the DS's *42 All-Time Classics*.

メガ駆動機構

Hanafuda literally means "flower cards" – though for those of you who are overcompensating with regards to your masculinity, rest assured it's very much a manly game enjoyed even by Yakuza (Japanese Mafia). Just imagine a Japanese Joe Pesci from *Goodfellas* playing Hanafuda (or even Takeshi Kitano in *Sonatine*). Exactly, you wouldn't go up to a Japanese Joe Pesci and say "Flower Cards? That's a funny game for a man to be playing." – "Funny? Funny how?!"

Nintendo didn't invent Hanafuda cards; no one knows who did. Games played using cards have existed in Japan since its earliest eras, though weren't available for the masses. In 1549 Portuguese sailors brought with them their own variety of cards for gambling – 84 years later Japan was shut off from foreigners and all foreign card games were banned. Local varieties kept being developed and subsequently banned. Eventually, around the early 1800s, the government started relaxing gambling laws and somewhere out of the time fog emerged Hanafuda. It was later also adopted by Korea and Hawaii, proving extremely popular.

The year 1889 was significant. The Eiffel Tower was opened, Adolf Hitler was born, and Fusajiro Yamauchi (great grandfather of Hiroshi Yamauchi) formed Nintendo in Kyoto. It was solely to manufacture Hanafuda cards by hand (legend has it, using Mulberry tree bark) then sell in a Kyoto and Osaka shop. They still make them today (though no longer with tree bark).

FROM POYCHI ROBO

GAMES FROM THE EAST WHICH NEVER MADE IT TO UK SOIL

NPROMISE



» The wrapper on Nintendo's decks show the three differently priced variations available.



» If you're going after an authentic Nintendo deck, make sure it has an official sticker on it.

A deck consists of 12 suits, each based on a calendar month and represented by a flower (hence "Flower Cards") and occasionally animals. March is pink cherry blossoms for example, while October has maple leaves with one card featuring a deer. Each suit has four cards of varying strengths – a total of 48 cards. Each card is assigned an arbitrary score purely to differentiate importance levels: these have no direct effect on gameplay. Plain (junk) cards are worth one point and each suit normally has two. Ribbon Cards (blue, red, or poetry) are worth five, while animal (or highly detailed) cards are worth 10 or 20, with each suit normally having one of each.

Explaining the actual game's course of events, and also learning to play, is quite difficult. This is simply because there are so many rule sets for scoring (plus style variations). The joke is, there are as many rule sets as there are groups of friends who play Hanafuda; it actually encourages adaptation to suit personal tastes. Thankfully, this means there is no "wrong" way to play Hanafuda as long as players are in total agreement and enjoy themselves.

Let's cover a two-player game, using the popular basic Koi-Koi style. One player deals three sets of eight cards – to both players, and face-up on the table. Dealer goes first: if held cards match any on the table he can choose to put one down (a bit like snap – then placing matched cards within an "accumulated" pile), otherwise one must be discarded face-up onto the table. Afterwards a card must be taken from the pile, and if it matches one on the table those are "accumulated", otherwise it's left on the table. Then it's the other player's turn, and so on.

The basic objective is to form "yaku" or special combinations of cards (like poker), which then give that player a specific amount of points. The first player to reach 50 wins (though other goals can be agreed on). For example the boar, deer and butterfly cards are a special combination, scoring roughly five points depending on rule-set used. When a player's accumulated pile contains a combination, the game can then either be stopped (with points totted up) and a new one begun, or the player can shout "koi-koi" (doubling all potential scores) and strive for another combination. If another is gained, they can stop or again continue (resulting in triple scoring), and so on. It's risky though since rival players in the meantime can get a combination, with multiplied score, leaving the original player with nothing. When someone stops, all held combinations are scored and then multiplied resulting in massive points. The real fun though comes when friends create their own personalised combinations, fine-tuning the game, and then add beers and peanuts to the mix. It's the perfect evening social game, as people look over score charts and jovially debate their preferred rules.

Other companies also produce the cards, but for the true retro freak only the official Nintendo variety will do. There are three types available: Miyako No Hana (delicate flower and river imagery) is the cheapest, costing 1000 Yen (£5); Heaven's Luck (red-faced bearded man) costs more at 1500 Yen (£6.70); while for the ultimate gangster, there's the Premium Pack (Napoleon) costing 2000 Yen (£10). The Nintendo Club in Japan also has a *Mario*-themed set available. You can buy Hanafuda cards in Japan fairly easily from most (big) shops with large toy sections, or alternatively from specialist stores. In the UK your best bet is eBay, printing your own off the Internet, or a dedicated importer – around £10 is a good price. Go on, track down a deck and convince a fellow Nintendite to play. Koi-koi!

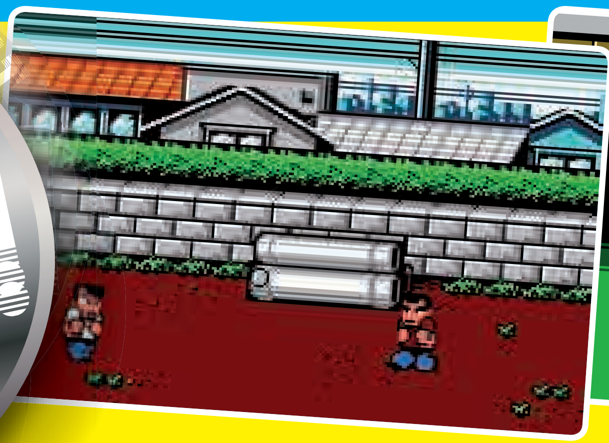


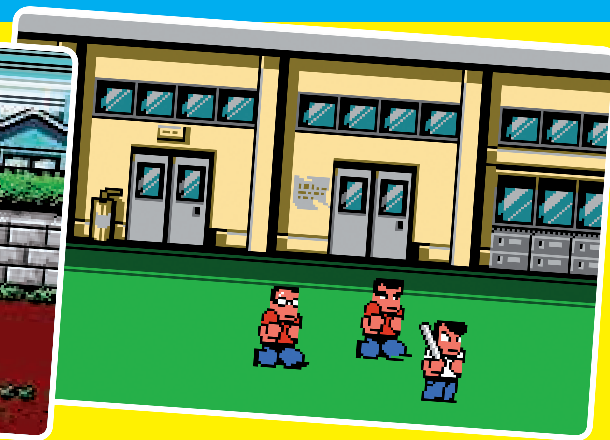


» Only available via Club Nintendo are special themed decks. Cleverly, the boar is replaced with Donkey Kong, full moon with a Boo, and butterflies with winged Goomba.

Be sure to check out the Internet for further information, score charts, and rule sets. Poychi Robo quite likes using www.sloperama.com

私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

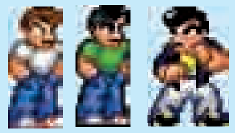




RIVER CITY RANSOM

Publisher: Technos
Developer: In-House
Released: 1989
Featured Format: NES
Expect to pay: £8

EVERY MONTH RETRO GAMER COVERS AN UNDERRATED GAME EXPLAINING "WHY YOU MUST PLAY" IT. HIGH-SCHOOL GANG-WARS, KIDNAPPED BABES, AND DUDES WHO SHOUT "BARF!" – IT'S THAT CRAZY TECHNOS BRAWLER STARRING KUNIO-KUN FROM THE LATE EIGHTIES, AND EVERY GANG IN THE CITY IS INVITED TO PARTICIPATE. JOHN SZCZEPANIAK DONS HIS COLOURS AND HITS THE STREETS TO EXPLAIN RIVER CITY RANSOM.



SPIRITUAL FOLLOWERS?

River City Ransom was ahead of its time, deserving much better sales, and many wish it had a proper sequel as opposed to the Japan-only variations Technos produced. Similarly the SNES follow-ups were too different. In 2002, people's hopes were almost realised in an unlikely way. Armen Casarjian, an Atari employee, applied for the expired trademark "River City Ransom" on a whim. He never anticipated getting it, but after six months received positive confirmation. Lacking any source materials he formed Realize Games, intending to develop it from scratch, but sadly abandoned the project (he says out of respect) after discovering Atlus had made a GBA update of the original, despite them not owning the name (see LostLevels.org). Today Sega's *Yakuza* on PS2 is the closest spiritual successor to *RCR* in years. Despite its faults and grittier setting, the gradual skill building, gang fights, and weapons system, are all eerily familiar.

Purists would argue we should title this under its original Technos moniker of *Downtown Nekketsu Monogatari* (loosely translated as Downtown Nekketsu Story; although Nekketsu literally means hot-blooded, it's actually the name of the main character's downtown high-school), since the American-named *River City Ransom* underwent some scripting and graphical changes (jeans and T-shirts as opposed to school uniforms). Alternatively it could be argued that we should be referring to it as *Street Gangs*, which was its official European rebranding. However, for the sake of accessibility we're ignoring the Japanese release (this is Why You Must Play, not Eastern Promise), and as the UK release has such nauseatingly atrocious boxart, we've opted for the American version.

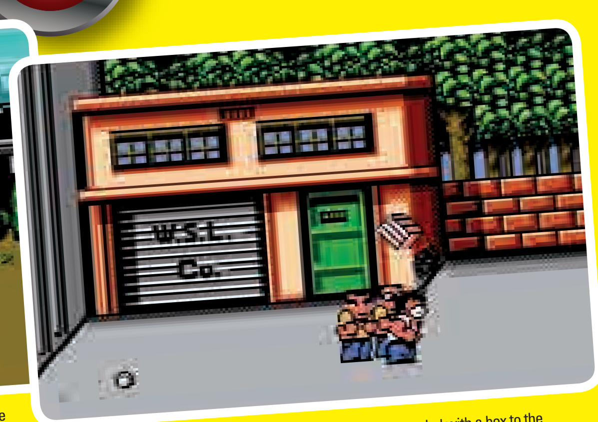
River City Ransom is actually part of a long-running series of Kunio-kun games by Technos. The first game (and direct predecessor to *RCR*) was the revolutionary *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-kun* which was later localised for the West and became the much loved *Renegade* (one of the earliest scrolling brawlers from that era). This technically makes *RCR* the equivalent of a Technos developed *Renegade 2* (as opposed to *Target Renegade*, which was by other developers); we realise some regard *Double Dragon* as a Technos developed spiritual successor, but it doesn't contain the same characters or continuing storyline like *River City Ransom*.

Hitting America in early 1990 *RCR* was a dramatic shift away from more traditional scrolling-beat-'em-ups, incorporating non-linearity, the ability to visit past areas, and, most importantly, RPG-elements in the form of stats, learnable moves, equipable items, and various shops. Undeniably this gives it more complexity/depth than other Technos games, like *Double Dragon* and *Renegade*, which some argue makes it the better title – certainly its gameplay has aged more gracefully. Unfortunately it didn't achieve the same success previously found in Japan or seen by games like *Double Dragon* in the West, possibly due to the blending of genres and new Super Deformed visuals (exaggerated big heads), and only in later years was its brilliance recognised by people going back to or discovering it for the first time.

The premise is simple: you (Alex) and your friend (Ryan, in two-player mode) are students at Cross Town High (a less affluent establishment), when Ryan's



» There are secrets galore, like this section underneath the Capital Avenue Bridge where you get rumbled.



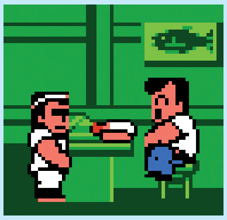
» It's a double rear-attack coupled with a box to the head – that's gotta hurt something fierce.

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Spare change burning a hole in your pocket?



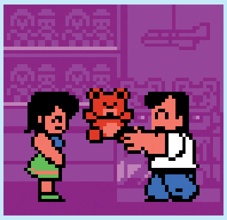
Book Stores You can buy comics and gossip rags, but it's best to buy books (usu $26.95), which teach you special techniques like 'Dragon Feet'.



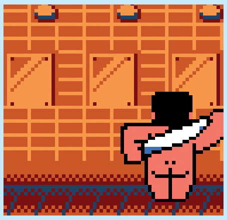
Sushi Bar Varieties of sushi are available, plus rolls, giving stat boosts and stamina. Other restaurants, selling burgers or chicken, are available.



Drugstores A US word for chemists (as opposed to a narcotics den), the medicines here don't restore much energy but affect specific stats.



Toys Galore Buy stat-boosting toys, some $50+. The pricier ones are videogames like *Maze Craze* and *Decathlete* (non-playable).



Pop's Health Club If Kunio gets stressed, why not head to Pop's Health Club and enjoy a sauna for $3.50; it boosts willpower, stamina and power.



CD Cellar This stocks R&B, Rock, Pop, Soul and Classical music. All cost $9.95 and increase stats. It may sound exciting, but the items are boring.



» The main hero, Alex, takes a moment to rest in the rival River City gang's high-school. Not far to go now.

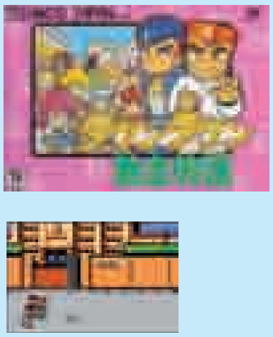
> "ANYONE WHO LIKES FILMS LIKE THE WARRIORS WILL FIND PARALLELS WITH AND GREATLY ENJOY RIVER CITY RANSOM"

girlfriend (Cyndi) gets kidnapped (while shopping) by "powerful gang lord" and River City High student 'Slick', who also takes over the city using his personal army of gangs. There's obviously only one solution – punching and kicking your way across the city, defeating all gang members and leaders in the way, before finally confronting Slick to set both Cyndi and the city free.

Every gang is colour coded, has its own backstory, and a specific set of recognisable personality traits. The rich Frat Guys are cowards without weapons, Home Boys are slow 'couch potatoes', the Internationals are exchange students who prefer bare-knuckle fighting, and so on. There are also distinctive and powerful bosses littered throughout (with some hidden away), who provide pacing, advance the storyline, and pose a much tougher challenge than regular enemies. Thanks to some clever randomisation, each of these regular gang members also has a different face and name. They're also rather talkative, chatting before and during battle before finally shouting a battle cry after defeat (quite often the word "BARF!").

HOT-BLOODED DOWNTOWN STORY

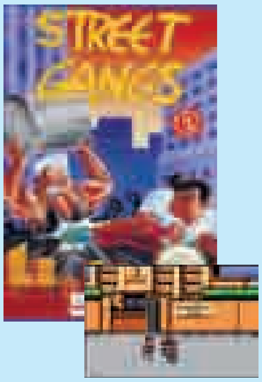
There were many iterations of Technos' underappreciated classic



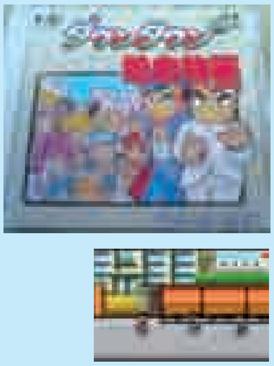
JAPAN
Downtown Nekketsu Monogatari, released in 1989 on the Famicom. The sequel to *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-kun* (*Renegade*), this introduced the Super Deformed style.



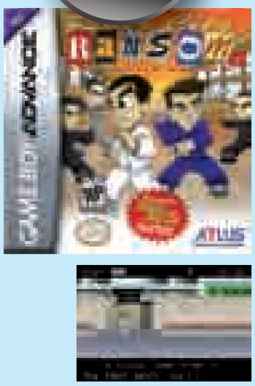
USA
River City Ransom, released in America (1990) on the NES. Identical to the Famicom version, apart from some script changes and all the characters now wearing casual clothes.



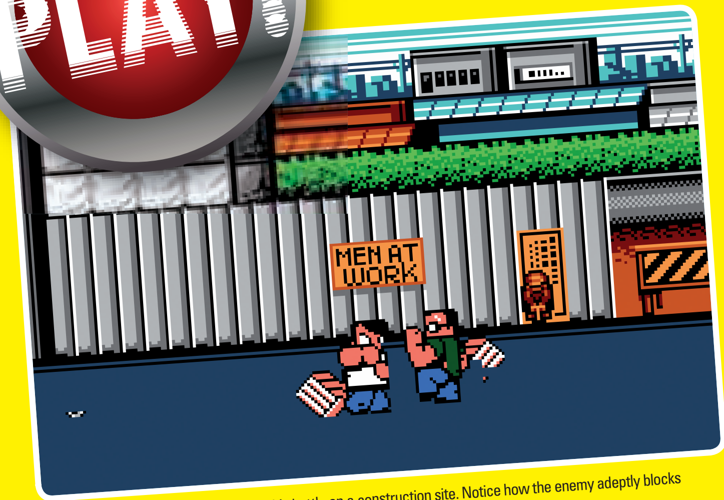
UK
Street Gangs, released in the UK (1991) for NES. Identical to the USA version (apart from crippling 50Hz borders, slowdown, and altered title). But what the hell is the cover?!



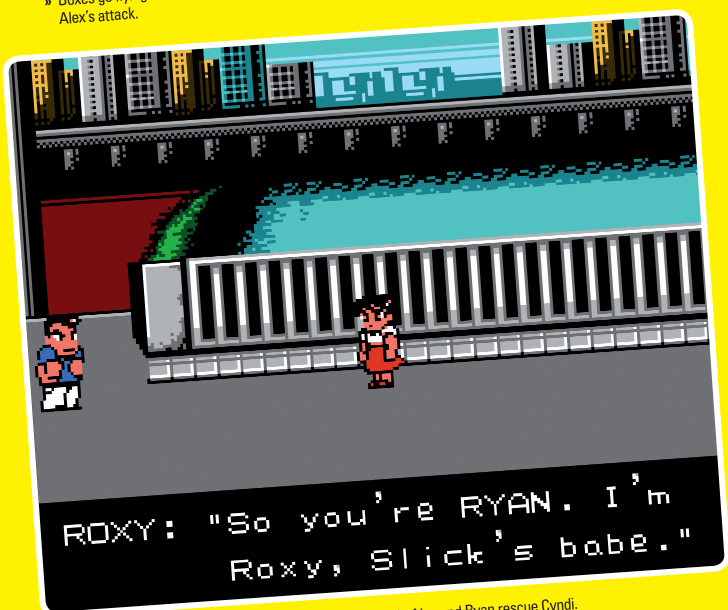
JAPAN
Port of the Famicom original, done by Naxat, released in Japan (1993) for NEC's PC-Engine Super-CD add-on. Features improved visuals, CD quality music, plus speech!



USA
RCR EX, released in America (2004) for the GBA. Despite not owning the name, Atlus brought this to the USA. Good due to more enemies onscreen, but suffered from ropey localisation.



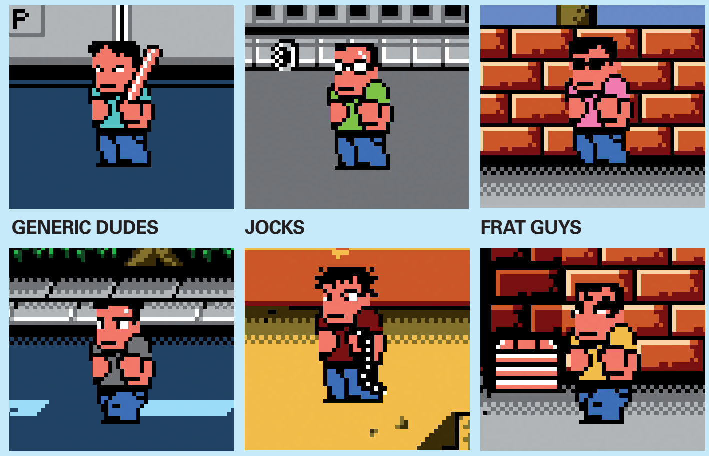
» Boxes go flying everywhere during this battle on a construction site. Notice how the enemy adeptly blocks Alex's attack.



» An interesting early plot revelation: Roxy leaves Slick to help Alex and Ryan rescue Cyndi.

THE OUTSIDERS

There are nine (colour-coded) gangs in River City, each with their own personalised attack style, character traits, and dozens of named members. Here are some of them.



GENERIC DUDES | JOCKS | FRAT GUYS

THE MOB | SQUIDS | HOME BOYS

Since the US education system, and Japanese equivalent which is analogous, won't be easy to relate to for Europeans (our culture being so different), a lot of the enjoyment is derived from having previously experienced examples of media which represent these things. Anyone in England who was made at upper-school to read SE Hinton's *The Outsiders* or watch *Westside Story* at the theatre, or alternatively has seen films like *The Warriors*, will likely find parallels with and greatly enjoy *River City Ransom*. The volatile subject of gang wars has been defanged, allowing you to enjoy the violence and rousing adventure with an emotional detachment. Perversely there's also only one ethnic group – white teenagers (though this is likely due to them previously all being Japanese students).

But it's about so much more than the setting. Unlike a lot of NES games from this era, which can have poor controls and painfully limited gameplay, *River City Ransom* is filled with subtlety and layers of depth which only become apparent over time, and has aged so well that even today it's easily accessible, very enjoyable, and in terms of raw mechanics wouldn't look out of place on a modern handheld.

Collision detection is solid, accurate and uses clever ideas, like enemies being able to hit each other. It's possible to line yourself up, and if foes aren't paying attention they will accidentally hit their friends thereby making your task easier. The whole fighting system is well realised and, for its time, very advanced, making deft use of the NES' limited four-way D-pad and two-action-button design. Using a combination of only six available button-presses, it's possible to perform simple combos, dash moves, flying and spin kicks, cannonball attacks, rapid flurries of fists and feet, uppercuts, rebounds and throws. Pushing a button at the same time an enemy attacks will block the move; this also applies to weapons. You can kick weapons into enemies, jump onto any crates they're holding (creating a mini-totem pole), bat thrown weapons back baseball-style and even ride on rolling tyres. Technos created a highly versatile system which is innately fun to play around with.

"THE FIGHTING IS WELL REALISED AND FOR ITS TIME VERY ADVANCED, MAKING DEFT USE OF THE NES' LIMITED DESIGN. TECHNOS CREATED A HIGHLY VERSATILE SYSTEM WHICH IS INNATELY FUN"

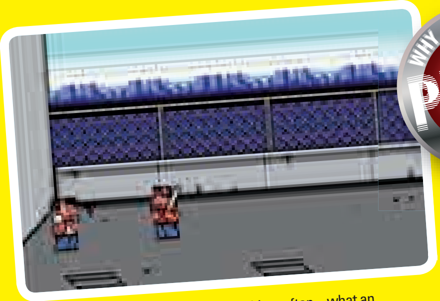
When not fighting there is also a plethora of items available in shops, which is daunting at first, but because they're all positive to varying degrees, the sense of



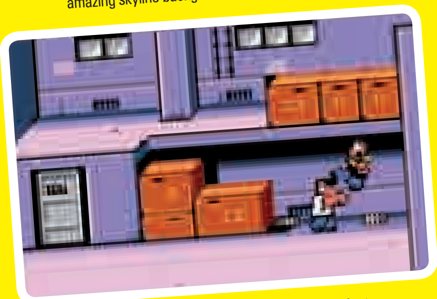
» A vacant "Wheel Factory" serves as the backdrop for several brawls and a boss fight.



» Fighting is prohibited 'at the mall', but you can grab a burger, buy new shoes, and generally chill out.



» Gearing up for the final fight on this rooftop – what an amazing skyline background to battle against.



» More enemies to defeat within this warehouse. Just be sure to jump over the wall in its centre.

discovery during purchase is quite satisfying. If you can't afford that expensive steak or fancy boots now, there's the urge to continue in order to later return to finally see what the effects are. It's these items which give the game such a strong RPG flavour, as each one increases various stats which in turn makes moves easier to execute. While you can run straight for the final showdown from the start (double-tap to run), and theoretically reach it in ten minutes, the strength of later enemies is such that you need to spend time fighting, earning cash, and stat boosting to learn new moves. But unlike grind-heavy RPGs (which demand levelling-up), the fighting and visiting of stores is the core element here and, thankfully, it's great fun.

Mixing things up and dramatically changing the pace of the game is the simultaneous two-player mode (something which was conspicuously missing from the GBA update in 2004). With two players co-operating it's possible to surround tougher enemies and guarantee that at least one of the players will avoid being attacked. It's also possible to team-up (literally), by having one player holding a crate while the other rides around on it. If the one is knocked down, it's even possible for the other to pick him up to use him as a weapon! Of course if someone starts hoarding all the money dropped by enemies, the two can ignore the final goal and start scrapping with each other.

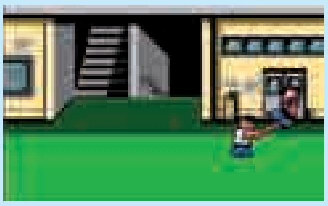
By now you should hopefully see that *River City Ransom* contains all the classic scrapping you'd expect from other (more popular) Technos brawlers (not to mention other titles like *Final Fight* and *Streets Of Rage*), but it greatly enhances the fight system, adds a unique layer of RPG-like mechanics, and also has a funny storyline to go along with it. Without question, it would have been a Classic Game if only more people had played it back in the day. Correct this error: go out and enjoy it today.

BEATING IMPLEMENTS

Some weapons are found in the streets, while others must be taken from enemies. They can be thrown or used to strike people.

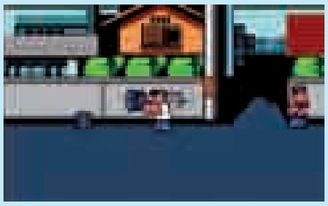
CLUB

Comes in wood (weak) and metal (brutal) varieties. Clubs are a common weapon with average range and reasonable power.



TRASH CAN

Difficult to throw but a metal trashcan to the face works wonders. Sadly we're unsure if it contains a trashbag full of ducklings.



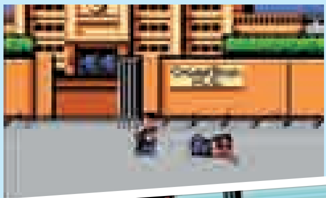
TYRE

These can used like trashcans, or thrown and then jumped on to be rolled along the ground for massive knock-down damage.



CHAIN

Longer ranging than clubs, and very powerful, the chain is our weapon of choice. For best results, use it to floss an enemy's teeth.



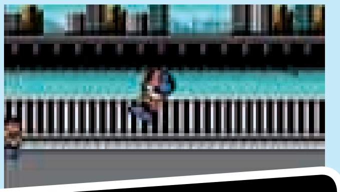
OTHER PEOPLE

When all else fails grab an unconscious enemy and use their body like a club to batter foes. In two-player mode you can use your friends.



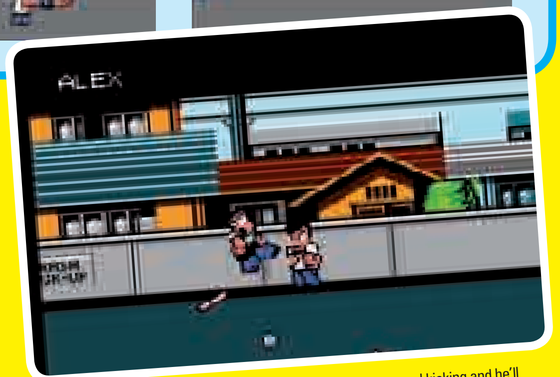
BODY THUMPING

Of course without implements, it's a case of using your own body. Later on you can learn special moves, like this one.





» One of the best features of *RCR* was its simultaneous two-player mode. Utterly brilliant, and very hectic.

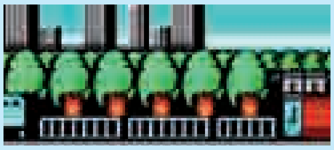


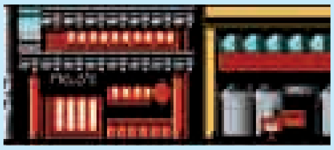
» give a rival gang member a good kicking and he'll reward you with a hilarious expression

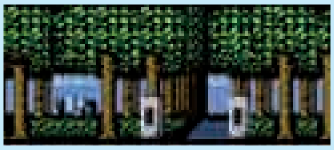
AN UNDERCURRENT OF DEPRAVITY WITHIN SUBURBIA

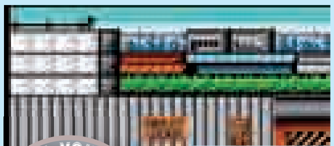
Throughout *River City Ransom* are a series of different locales, which should seem familiar, wherever you live: suburban neighbourhoods, local parks, shopping malls, construction sites with youths fooling about, and of course various high-schools. All that is missing is a set of massive scummy bins which most younger kids like to play and hide inside of.

















HE WAS A SCHOOL TEACHER; AN UNSUNG COMMODORE 64 HERO; WORKED WITH NINTENDO'S INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY; AND WAS A PIONEER IN TERMS OF EDUCATIONAL SOFTWARE, THE CD MEDIUM, AND ALSO CORPORATE OUTSOURCING WITHIN GAMING. JOHN SZCZEPANIAK REVEALS TO THE WORLD THE TRUTH BEHIND DALE DESHARONE, A MAN WHO HAS DONE IT ALL.

DALE DESHARONE

IN THE KNOW

IN BRIEF...

Starting as an elementary school teacher Dale DeSharone took a computing course and began programming for Atari's early 8-bit computers, winning $5000 worth of equipment. He left teaching, creating educational software and popular adventure games, before joining Spinnaker fulltime and doing pioneering work with CD technology. One year turned into four and he set up his own company, Animation Magic, which acquired the rights to use Nintendo IP, and dealt with outsourcing. This was sold on and Dale worked for Capitol Multimedia, before starting Boston Animation, creating several games and winning awards. He now develops assets for other companies, including Sony.

Some industry legends rise above developer-publisher politics, transcending PR departments, and are recognised by all who play games. Then there are those who also have a great influence on things but, for whatever reason, remain unknown. This lack of recognition is heightened when individuals change their surname. Until issue 27's article on the CDi's *Zelda* and *Link* games, few readers would have recognised the name Dale DeSharone, though several are likely to have played his Apple II or C64 games, and should therefore recognise the name Dale Disharoon.

It's not easy tracking shadows within the industry, especially when the paper trail takes you in every direction (books, software, nanotechnology); when events span more than 25 years; and when there is an inexplicable name-break in the middle. A forgotten corporate moniker on an obscure CDi game, along with the accompanying credits, plus some blind faith, finally joined the two disparate titles. My search for truth took me to Boston Animation, where I presented the evidence. DeSharone was taken aback, surprised that anyone would go to such lengths. "You're sharp. Sounds like you really did your research." But why the name change I ask, what reason could there be? Was it for his own protection from certain nefarious agents? Apparently not, and the true story will soften the hearts of even the most unromantic readers. "I got married (2nd) 15 years ago and my wife didn't like the name Disharoon. She had lived in Israel for many years and wanted a different softer 'sound'. Something she felt was more poetic. The Disharoons were French Huguenots who settled in Baltimore, Maryland in the late 1600s I believe. I had never been to Baltimore but I called 'information' and found more Disharoons there than I ever knew existed (having grown up in California). The third person I called had just completed a genealogy and told me that the closest spelling to the original name when the Disharoons first arrived in the colonies was DeSharone. I liked it. It had a softer sound to it and I knew that people would stop asking me if I was Dutch. It's easy to change your name here in the States when you get married so I just took the older version of the name. The only problem with it (which I hadn't considered) has been that old friends have had a hard time finding me over the years."

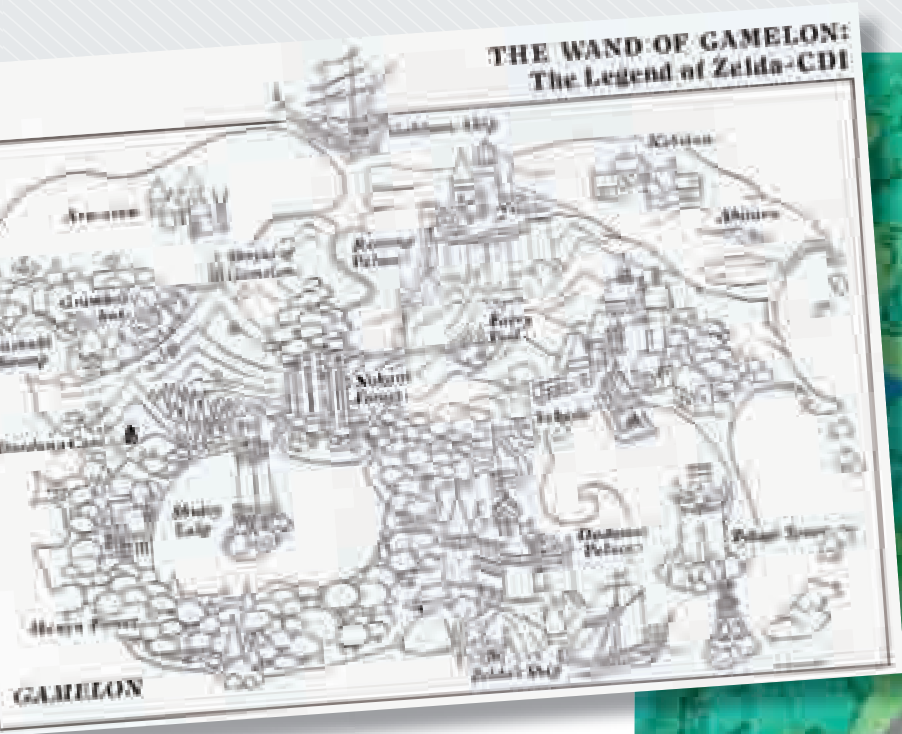
But what of his work within the games industry? In a situation analogous to that of Spectrum legend Don Priestly, Dale began his career first as a primary school teacher, with a discreet entry into videogames the result of fortuitous timing. "Well, let's see, my major in college was film and video production. So I always had an interest in production of entertainment products. But I was particularly interested in kids, and wanted to have some experience working with kids. So when I got out of college I got into teaching, and taught for three years. This was like at the end of 1979. Right at that time, home computers were coming on the scene, when the Apple II made its appearance, and the Atari 400/800."

He elaborated further on how the education system ignited a fascination with computers. "The principle of the school wanted to get computers, and I didn't know anything about them, and I wanted the school to get woodworking equipment… But she was the principle, so she got her way. She took me into a programming workshop, that Radioshack was giving, on programming the TRS-80. I saw the possibilities of computers, in terms of presenting visual information, although it was quite crude at that time. But afterwards I was very excited about it. We ended up getting Atari computers for the school, a couple of them, and I got one myself, and taught myself to program."

We jovially muse on the irony of life, and how in those earlier, more innocent days, many people inexplicably ended up in games. "I just sort of fell into it by accident. Once I saw what it could do, I really enjoyed it. I started writing things for my kids in my class – educational games. At that time Atari had a user-written software program, Atari Programming Exchange, with a quarterly catalogue and prizes for best software in various categories. I submitted a couple of my educational games, they won the first and second prizes of the quarter they were submitted. I won about $5000 worth of Atari computer equipment. That was 'big' for me

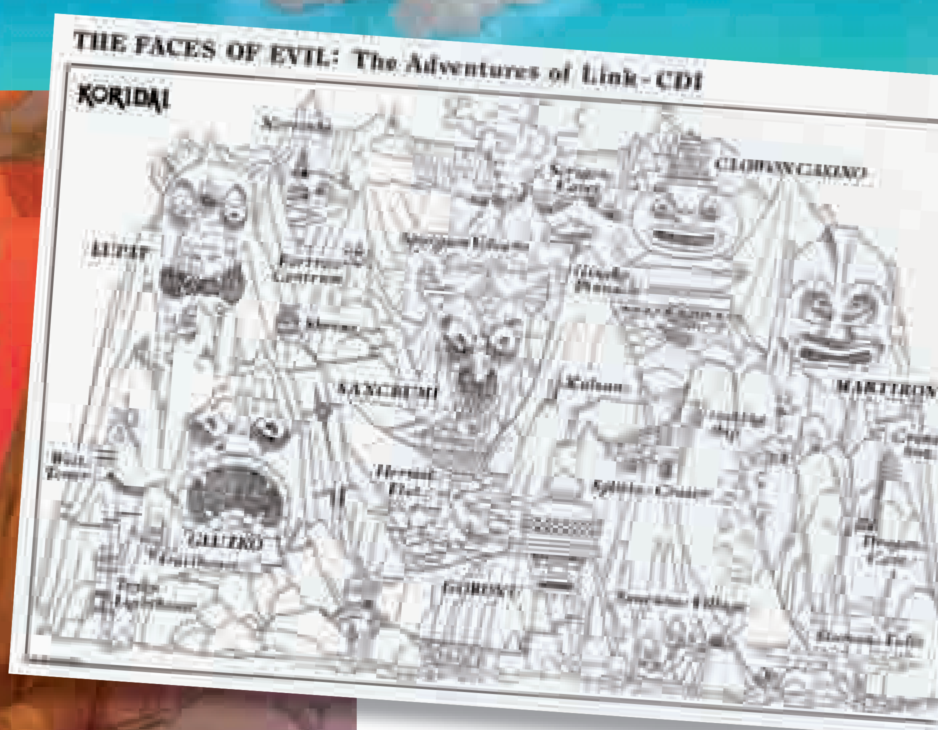


» Two of the videogame books Dale worked on, along with Herb Kohl and Ted Kahn.





» We weren't able to include these images in the Making Of article due to timing, but here they are now. Large scans of original artwork that DeSharone had looked after for the past decade.





» Further maps and corresponding original watercolour artwork. The Monet-style hand-drawn imagery for in-game backgrounds was stunning.

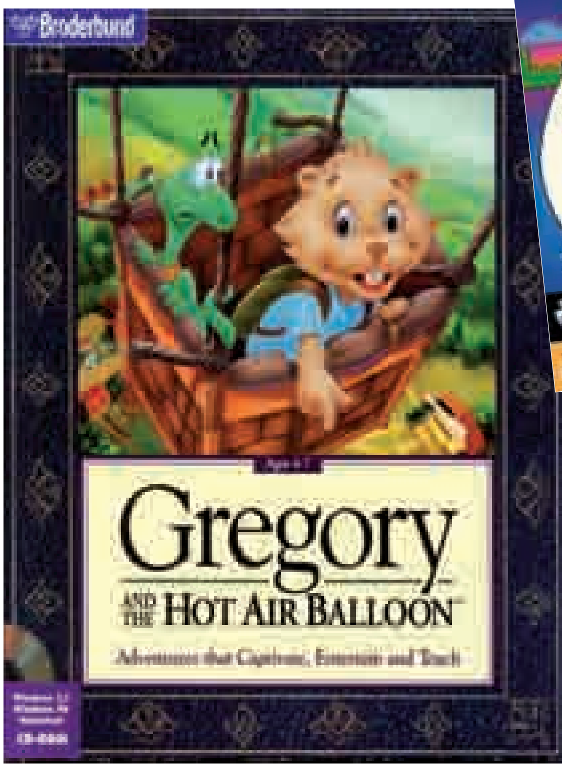
DALE DESHARONE

Militarised Nanotech

With a strong background in animation, plus a college major in film and video production, DeSharone's latest company, Boston Animation, works on more than just videogames. In 2004 it won a prestigious Telly Award for animation and film work. The Newswire Press Release said the following: "Top award for video animation at the 2004 international Telly Awards has gone to two Concord (Massachusetts) creative firms, working together to create a film for MIT's exciting new nanotechnology laboratory. DigiNovations' North Bridge Productions and Boston Animation paired up to design and create the film, which shows the work of MIT scientists and engineers at the molecular scale to create exotic new materials and devices to protect US soldiers." Dale DeSharone also said on record, "The chance to show how MIT's groundbreaking work could be applied was something we couldn't pass up. We're proud to have our work recognized in this very special way."



» After Animation Magic was sold to Capitol Multimedia, DeSharone's team worked on a series of games for Broderbund, aimed at the 4-7 year old market.

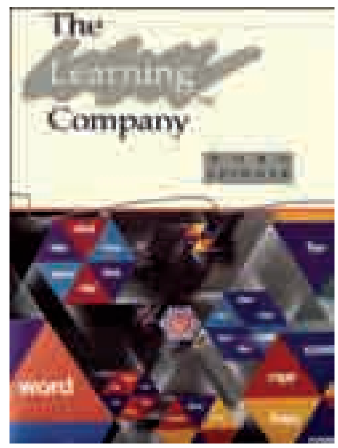






» Two of the CDi's launch titles which DeSharone oversaw during his time at Spinnaker, making him one of the pioneers of CD-ROM based games.





» Everyone has to start somewhere, and these are two of the earliest titles DeSharone worked on. From these humble beginnings he'd go on to be involved with some of the industry's biggest companies.

at the time (1980) because my teacher's salary was only $11,000 per year. About four titles were published in the catalogue." Two of them, *Addition Magician* and *Word Spinner*, proved so popular that a company called The Learning Company saw them on the Atari Program Exchange and wanted to publish versions for the Apple II computer.

Captivated by this binary wonderland, DeSharone had to make an epic life altering decision: education, or games? "After the third year I stopped teaching. I had actually wanted to continue, but I was half-time, and they wanted a full-time teacher. So, I thought that I could probably at least earn as much money making games, as I was teaching. Which was more than true!" He then summarised his post-teaching years, "After leaving teaching I created Dale Disharoon, Inc. We created games for Spinnaker and the Learning Company and a few books for Prentice Hall. Most of our games were created for Atari 400/800, Commodore 64, Apple II and IBM PC. We also did Atari ports of a few Strategic Simulations games (*Shiloh* and *Normandy*)." This raises an interesting point, and further complicates his history, since DeSharone dabbled as an author. He replied modestly, "I worked with Herb Cole, and I guess I did, what? A couple of Atari and Commodore books, on games and educational games."

I then asked him about Spinnaker. "I wrote some early educational games for them. *Alphabet Zoo*, *Hey Diddle Diddle*, and another called *Adventure Creator*." This creative utility (1984), Dale's first foray into mainstream gaming, was very clever in what it achieved, and is still popular among those who've discovered it. Despite a 16k cartridge limit (we tested the C64 version), the actual design tools are quite versatile and make for a fun title. Brilliantly, dungeons can also be randomly generated and played.

From here he went on to create one of the highlights in his softography, *Below The Root*, a particularly good flick-screen adventure based on a series of books. "I was in Northern California, and the author of the book, Zilpha Keatley Snyder, lived about an hours drive from where I was living and working. So I went to visit and showed her what computer games looked like. She became very interested in the possibility of collaborating on a game. We worked very closely then on the design of the game, based on the book." Even long before the often spoken about *Zelda* and *Link* games for the CDi, Dale was getting accustomed to working with licensed source material. I asked if the author was happy with how the source material was used. "Yes. She wrote a lot of the dialogue herself, she played with the map, the mapping of the world we worked on together. She was instrumental all the way along the process of building the game. It was a lot of fun working with her."

A year later he again worked with book-based material, in the form of Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland*. It used the same flick-screen engine, which allowed item usage and speaking with various characters, though perhaps the source material wasn't quite as interesting. Both of these were published by Spinnaker, under its Windham Classics line. Another year



» Bright, colourful, and genuinely great fun whatever your age. The M&M games (available on PC and PSOne), are a personal favourite of Dale's, and something he's very proud of.

"MY IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR, STEVE YELLICK (OF THE ORIGINAL RED BOOK SPECIFICATION TEAM), ABOUT A YEAR INTO THE PROJECT PUT HIS HEAD IN AN OVEN (LITERALLY) AND I BECAME THE MANAGER OF THE DEVELOPMENT GROUP"

DALE DESHARONE

later (1986) Spinnaker again published an adventure title which had DeSharone's involvement, under its Telarium line; *The Scoop* was an interesting murder mystery based on a novel which had Agatha Christie's involvement, available for DOS and Apple II computers. Although never having heard of it before, after loading the Apple II version it proved quite engrossing. This is a good example highlighting the fact that while DeSharone's works have always been consistently good, receiving critical praise from those fortunate enough to play them, his games haven't always reached as wide an audience as they deserve.

Having been connected to Spinnaker for some time DeSharone went to work for them in-house, helping to produce seven CDi launch titles. But the project was not without some morbid misfortune. "In 1987 I moved from Northern California to Boston, Massachusetts to help build a CDi team. I was brought on to help understand the capabilities of the platform and act as design lead. My immediate supervisor, Steve Yellick, was a guy out of MIT who knew a lot about laser technology and image compression, and had been a part of the original Red Book specification team. He didn't know much about building games however. About a year into the project he put his head in an oven (literally) and I became the manager of the development group. I designed, programmed, wrote editing tools and engines, and hired and managed artists, programmers and audio engineers."

Despite only planning to stay one year, repeated delays to the CDi launch resulted in one year becoming four. DeSharone revealed some astounding things regarding Philips' foray into games hardware, but let's save the juicy details for a Retroinspection. "After the launch of Spinnaker's seven CDi titles I left the company. I chose to start a

HIGHLIGHTS

DALE'S TOP TIPS



Name: Adventure Creator
System: C64, Atari 400/800
Year: 1984



One of Dale's first games not specifically created for educational purposes. It's a charming title which is both a creative utility, and an actual game even if you don't bother making anything (thanks to a smart random generator). It takes the form of a top-down maze (think *Adventure* on the Atari 2600), filled with traps, treasure chests (containing a variety of unusual items – silk pyjamas!), and various creatures. It's possible to make them friendly and ask questions, with the correct answer yielding information, or even trade items with you. From such simple building blocks, it's possible (and fairly easy) to create some substantial little quests.

Name: Below The Root
System: C64, DOS, Apple II
Year Released: 1984





DeSharone over the years has proved his skill at overseeing the development of great adventure titles, and this is one which still proves enjoyable today. You need to select one of several characters (each with different abilities) and search for a missing child who holds the key to a cataclysmic secret. Taking the form of a side-scroller there's no actual combat, but you need to converse with people, eat food and sleep regularly, solve puzzles, glide through tree, and most interestingly, read the minds of animals and other people. Hugely ambitious for the time, a constant sense of discovery keeps you engrossed even if you're only emulating it today.

Name: The Scoop
Systems: Apple II, DOS
Year released: 1986

Another adventure published by Spinnaker. Despite being excellent this one passed under our Retro Radar.

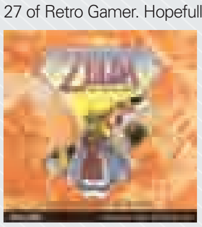




Dale explains, "*The Scoop* was part of their Telarium line. It's a funny 'publisher' story. The copyright had just expired on the [same named] book. I think it was written by the London Detective Writers Club (or something like that). Agatha Christie was a member. Each writer wrote one chapter. Spinnaker wanted to use the Agatha Christie name, so they used this expired copyright and the fact that she was one of the writers. I think we did a pretty good job with the game."

Name: Zelda/Link
Systems: CDi
Year Released: 1993

Zelda: Wand Of Gamelon and *Link: Faces Of Evil* was covered in Issue 27 of Retro Gamer. Hopefully the six-page feature answered all the questions anyone had regarding these maligned titles: How Dale DeSharone's company came to acquire the rights to Nintendo characters, the difficult development period that followed, and also why certain design decisions were made. The games are excellent, so long as you can look past the fact they weren't created by Nintendo. The staggered *Metroid*vania-style pacing, hand-painted backgrounds, and exceptional music, all make for a rousing adventure.





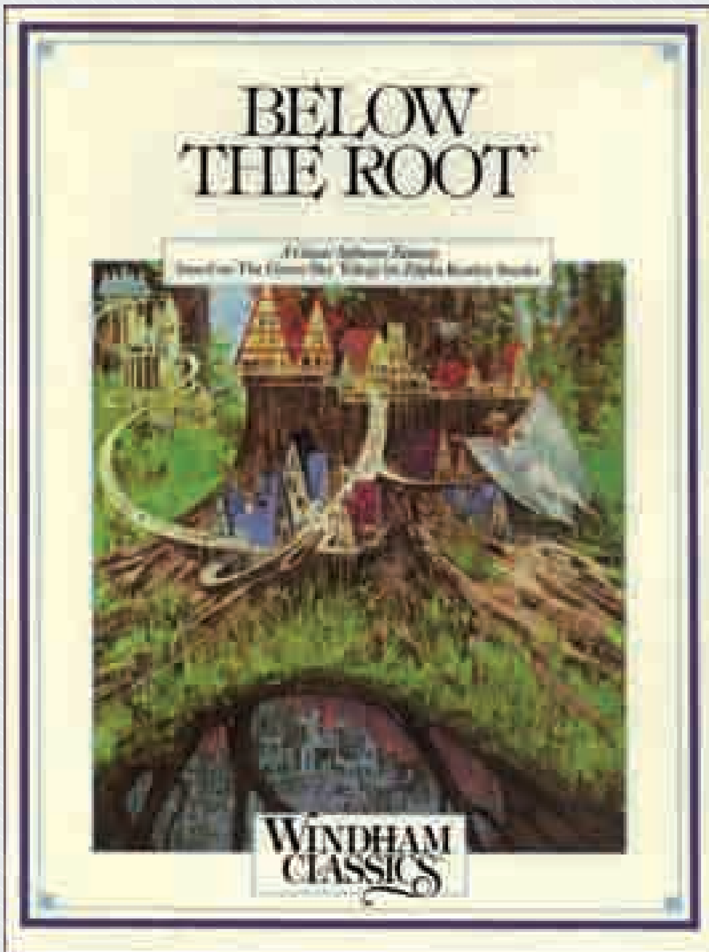
Name: Darkened Skye
System: GC, PC
Year Released: 2002

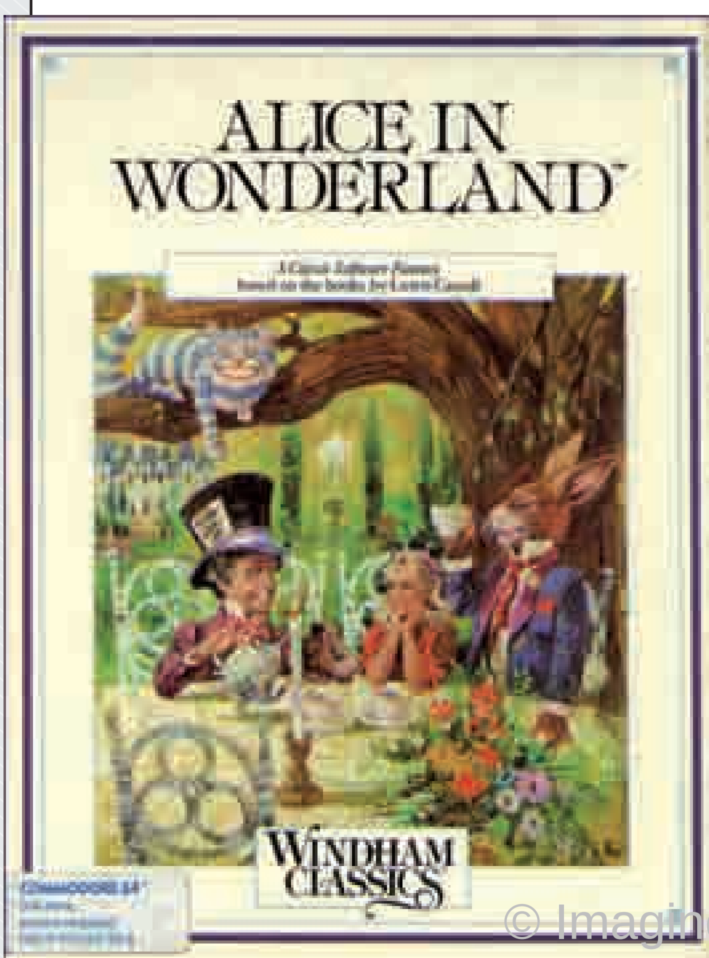
Darkened Skye was the last game developed by Boston Animation, and so understandably Dale speaks fondly. "I love *Darkened Skye*. It's difficult in the first levels. That's probably a design mistake. But it's a funny game, with a 300-page script, varied locations and beautiful art. If you play it... try to get the Gamecube version. The PC version has a problem with newer processors (animations are skipped) which ruins the game." While overlooked on release in the UK, it can be bought cheaply and, being compatible with the Wii, comes recommended.





DALE DESHARONE



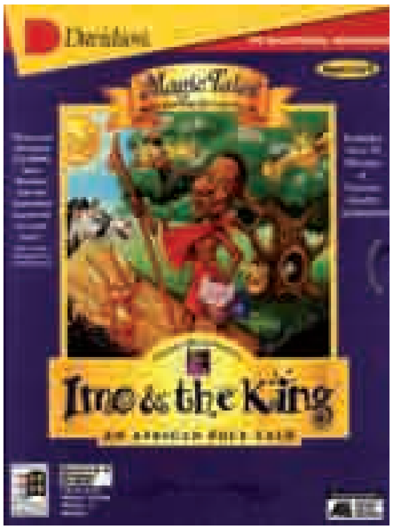


» Two excellent adventure titles (especially *Below The Root*) available across several formats. Even if you've not read the books, you should try the games.

new development company and was able to get development funding from AIM. A mutual friend put me in touch with Igor Razboff. Igor was also interested in starting a new technical company at this time (1991)." Razboof was from Russia, and this is where the two men set up a new studio, at first primarily to create animation. "I used the Dale Disharoon, Inc. corporate structure for the dozen people I had in Cambridge, MA. We named the St. Petersburg studio, and US structure that owned this studio, Animation Magic. At first Russia was only animators but then we saw that we could do programming and art too. It grew to about 150 people. So we transitioned from Dale Disharoon, Inc. to Animation Magic in the course of the *Link* and *Zelda* production." It is this naming discrepancy which allowed the Disharoon/DeSharone threads to be joined. This infamous usage of Nintendo's intellectual property is the most widespread and publicly spoken about aspect of Dale DeSharone's career; few had ever played them, though many felt the need to ignorantly comment on them. Retro Gamer has proven, previously, that they are games of genuine merit and very enjoyable.

This was also his first foray into outsourcing, by having a foreign company perform many tasks more affordably than a local one. "It worked out a pretty smooth process. Igor of course spoke Russian, and would talk to them on the phone everyday. He and I would both travel over, so one of us was there once every two months."

Despite their good fortune, the status quo wasn't maintained. "The Animation Magic company (US and Russia) was sold to Capitol Multimedia. I think maybe 1995. At that point I became Capitol's Executive Producer for the Davidson and Broderbund titles. By that time we were starting to go back to the games for kids. We developed a set of games that Davidson published, called *Magic Tales*. They were a lot like the *Living Books*, except were based on international folk tales. There were six that we created,



» A lot of his games have been edutainment titles aimed at young children, which is rather apt considering his teaching background. *Magic Tales* was a series published by Davidson.

and all of the art, animation, and engineering was done in the St Petersburg studio. Those were heavy in art and animation, designed for younger kids: edutainment titles."

Things would again change when, in April 1997, Capitol Multimedia sold selected assets for roughly $2.5 million. But this change spurred Dale on to greater things. "The old studio in St Petersburg was sold to the Blizzard guys and Davidson and all of that conglomerate. I decided to start a new company by myself, without a partner, in 1997. So that's when I went to the Ukraine and started Boston Animation. The current studio is over in Kiev."



» *Warcraft Adventures* was almost completely finished, and looking very promising, but was sadly never released.

"EVERY GAME HAS ITS STORY, IN TERMS OF TIMING, MONEY, AND CONSTRAINTS FROM THE PUBLISHER. I HAVE A LOT OF COMPASSION AND EMPATHY FOR ALL OF THE COMPANIES THAT GET GREAT GAMES OUT THE DOOR" DALE DESHARONE



» DeSharone always had a strong connection to Spinnaker. Some of his early titles proved very successful – notice the gold SPA sticker on *Facemaker,* showing it sold over 100,000 copies.

Boston Animation developed several games, though DeSharone was most keen to speak on the last two they developed. "I'd say *Darkened Skye* was the last game where we did all of the design, script, voice recording, engineering and art. We did it overlapping production with M&M's *Lost Formulas* (which is one of the games I'm most proud of). We did a *Tonka Firefighter* and *Scrabble Online* game for Atari since then. But, there wasn't much personal investment in those games for me."

The M&M game proved popular; it was a 2001 Codie Award Finalist. But the origin of the two proves unusual. "It was a strange 'Publisher Choice'. Simon & Schuster wanted to get the M&M license from Mars as they believed it would make a great game (the characters are recognized internationally). But, at the same time they negotiated to get the Skittles licence from Mars (in case they couldn't get M&M). Well, Mars gave them both licences. With Skittles, Mars wanted to make the brand more popular with people in their twenties, [thinking a cool game would do this]. I thought Skittles should be a little kids title. But, Mars, and then Simon & Schuster insisted on making it an adult game. So, we created a design based on the very cool Skittles television commercials (Merlin, Woman on White horse at Stonehenge, Gargoyles). There were over 50 people in Kiev working on it, for two years. By the time it was finished, Simon & Schuster didn't want people to think of it as a Skittles game anymore. But we had already woven Skittles into the gameplay and some text. Most people thought it was an advertisement (Mars paying Simon & Schuster to put their brand in computer game), but, it was really Simon & Schuster paying Mars a royalty on sales to use the brand." We assure him that the publishing world too, has such an undercurrent of politics.

Dale then mentions something which highlights his passion for creating good games, and the pride he takes in his work. "Also, I hope you've seen M&M's *Lost Formulas*. I love that game." Embarrassingly we have to admit that we weren't aware of it. But with the PC original and modified PSOne version (subtitled "Shell Shocked") available on eBay, it's something we'll be keeping an eye out for.

When asked if there was an exciting new project he'd like mentioned, he replied there was none. "Right now we're not developing new games, instead we're creating artwork for other companies' games. We've done quite a bit of artwork for Sony Online, for *Everquest 1* and *2*, and *Star Wars* games. And… we're doing a lot of work which I can't really talk about." Despite this Dale did kindly grant us full access to Boston Animation's private FTP: an Aladdin's cave of artwork and curios. While we aren't allowed to divulge all the titles they've worked on, trust Retro Gamer when we say that Boston Animation has had a hand in more games than you realise.

Clearly DeSharone is a man who has seen many things during his 25+ years in the industry. I ask what the biggest change has been. "Well, of course, the games are just getting huge. And I think that's part of why our transition is concentrating mostly on artwork right now, in terms of our offshore studio. To put an entire Triple-A game together requires so much money, and such a huge team these days."

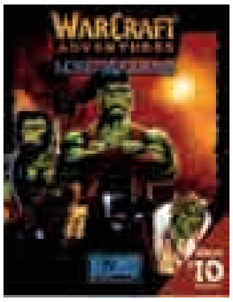
Times have sadly changed, and there's a hint of melancholy and nostalgia in his voice as he elaborates. "I really have seen a lot of different companies, and every game has its story. Not just the story of the game, but a story of what the situation was in terms of how it was built, where it went, and what the different facets are. You know, in terms of timing, money, hardware constraints, and constraints from the publisher. So I have a lot of compassion and empathy for all of the companies that get great games actually made and out the door. *laughs*"

But what does the future hold? Having seen the quality of past work, will his team ever again attempt a whole game? "We've thought about that. We've also thought about the downloadable market, which seems to be growing. So we've considered it. I guess in terms of actual game design, I feel that personally I'm taking something of a break. In the meantime I'm just focusing on the artwork."

FORGOTTEN GAMES



One of the more interesting games helmed by DeSharone at Animation Magic, which had actually been sold to Capitol Multimedia around 1995, went on to never be released. *Warcraft Adventures: Lord Of The Clans* would have followed on from *Warcraft II*, taking the form of a high-resolution point-and-click game, with players assuming the role of a young Orc named Thrall who was raised by a human, but must go on to free his people from humans. Dale explains, "With that studio we were working on *Warcraft Adventures*, which was almost finished but then never published. Almost all of that was done over in St Petersburg, and we worked pretty closely with the Blizzard guys on that. They visited the St Petersburg studio, and they visited the studio in… We eventually closed the Capital Multimedia office actually, and moved those people up to Concord here in Massachusetts. This was all in '96, '97." It was all downhill from there sadly and, on 22 May 1998, Blizzard announced they were cancelling the project. A concern was that it looked dated compared to other adventure games. The story was salvaged though, turning into a novel, with Thrall appearing in later games.





» The private FTP we were given access to had some stunning concept art, such as this image from *Darkened Skye.*

SPECIAL THANKS TO Mr Dale DeSharone for answering questions, going to great lengths to provide cover scans for all his software, and also providing original design artwork.



SUPER BOMBERMAN

TICK, TICK, TICK, TICK, BOOM!



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** PUZZLE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

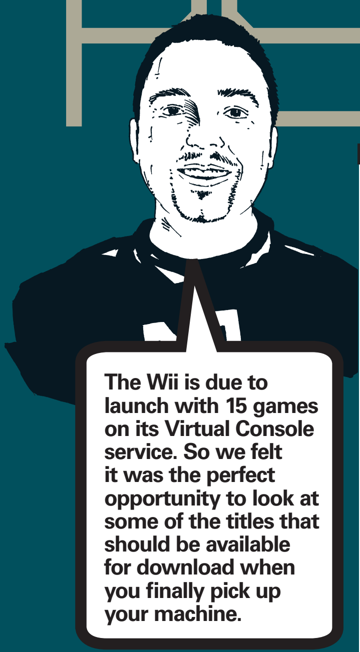
It can safely be said that people rarely play *Bomberman* for its single-player experience. Despite the odd exception – Saturn *Bomberman*'s RPG-esque adventure immediately springs to mind – ploughing through *Bomberman* on your own is a soulless experience and about as exciting as filling out a tax form.

So why then has *Bomberman* managed to survive cockroach-like over the years (it's now 24-years-old) when other franchises, which are more enjoyable to play, have withered and died by the wayside like a bouquet of week-old flowers that someone forgot to water? Simple. It just so happens to be blessed with one of the greatest multi-player experiences this side of the Saturn's excellent *Death Tank* (Google it, if you don't know what I'm talking about).

Taking place in a confined arena, the idea behind *Bomberman*'s 'battle mode' has always been simplicity itself: lay bombs and blow up your opponent until you're the last (Bomber) man standing. Initially starting off in separate corners of the screen you'd quickly start blowing up walls, which would hopefully yield an extra bomb or other useful power-up for you to totally humiliate your opponents with. As the playing area decreased in size and the length of each bomb's explosion grew, it soon became a frantic game of cat and mouse that saw you trying to avoid the trails of explosions whilst trying to trick an enemy into making a fatal error before you yourself faltered. Once you were able to stun an enemy with a well-kicked bomb, or better yet, use that well-kicked bomb to trap your hapless foe into a corner the feeling of elation was quite possibly unmatched by any other game. Even the firmest of friends could become instant enemies after a brief spell in Battle Mode, and with more new versions on the way, those rivalries could no doubt extend for another quarter of a decade.



RETRORATED



STARWING

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800

After being somewhat disappointed with the lack of on-rails action in *Starfox Command*, it comes as a rather bitter blow to discover that the original SNES classic lacks much of the impact that it once had.

The once revolutionary polygons now wobble around the screen at an alarming rate and can make navigating certain stages a hell of a lot more difficult than we once remember. Maybe we've been spoilt by the N64's outrageously good *Lylat Wars*, but *Starwing* just isn't that much fun to play anymore. A shame really, but that's progress for you…





» It looks dated now, but speeding through this space debris is still exciting.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 1,000

Due to having neigh-on similar architecture to the GameCube, Wii owners will be pleased to hear that all Virtual Console N64 games will feature the same improvements (high-res visuals, a more stable frame-rate) that appeared on the *Zelda* GameCube bonus disks.

You may be able to pick up an actual cartridge for less than the download price, but you can't deny the quality of Link's first 3D adventure. Filled with engaging characters, absorbing gameplay and a selection of cleverly designed dungeons, it's the perfect partner to Link's new Wii adventure and sets a great standard for future N64 VC releases.





» One of the Nintendo 64's greatest adventures is now available to play whenever you want.

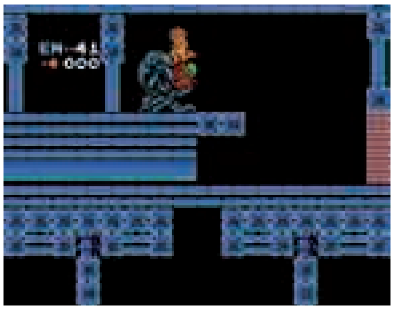
METROID

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 500

The original Metroid could be the most difficult game on the NES. Possibly. While it's been re-released several times (*NES Classics* on GBA, *Metroid Prime*, and *Metroid: Zero Mission*), it's likely few have given it the attention it deserves. But push past those early sections to find your first missile tank, laser beam, and morph-ball bombs, and suddenly it really starts to shine – looking and playing like a lesser version of *Super Metroid*. Of course it's not as good, but the original *Metroid* is still a great NES adventure if you have the patience to persevere.





SUPER MARIO BROS.

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 500

While it was one of Miyamoto's earliest games, and amazing back in the day, *Super Mario Bros.* hasn't aged as well as subsequent titles. The jumping and scrolling mechanics are still solid (some of the best on the NES), but it lacks the flamboyance and diversity of later games like *Super Mario Bros 3*. While very entertaining at first, you'll soon want something more varied and with more vibrant colours. Considering it costs 500 points, we'd personally rather go after one of the other NES titles available. *Super Mario Bros.* is in a word: "decidedly brown." Wait, that's two words! Dang…



» Ahh, this is where it all began. So many memories…



» Mario is so cool he can breathe underwater.

EXCITEBIKE

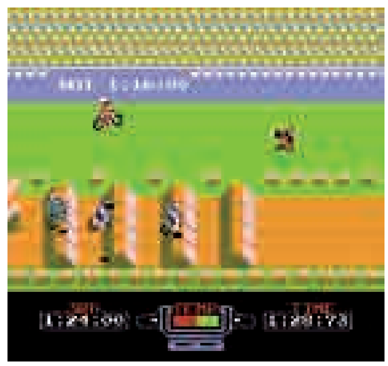
INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

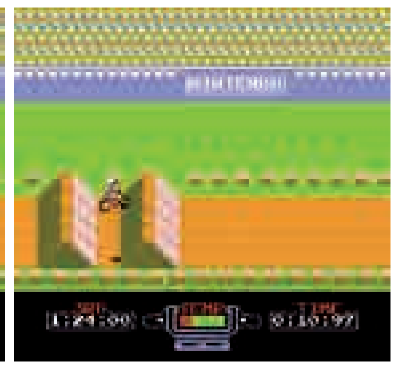
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 500

***Excitebike* is the perfect example of Nintendo gaming at its very best.** Don't be put off by the functional, yet oh so cure visuals, and simple sound effects – just allow yourself to get sucked in by its thoroughly enjoyable gameplay.

Easy to play, yet tough to master, *Excitebike* is a superb NES game that you'll constantly return to. The level design is utterly superb, the time trials boast plenty of replay value, and the course design editor is a stroke of genius. In fact, the only real downside to *Excitebike* is that racing against the CPU bikers is about as frustrating as teaching a pig to read the collected works of Shakespeare.



» Playing against the CPU bikers can be a maddening experience.



» The time trial mode is the best way to enjoy an introduction to *Excitebike*.

PC KID

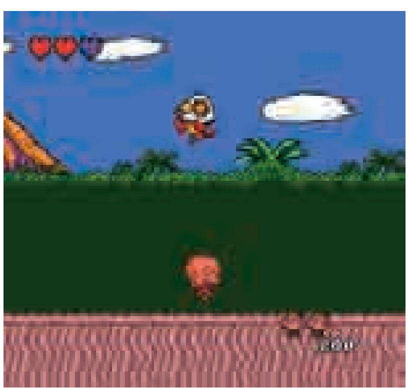
INFORMATION

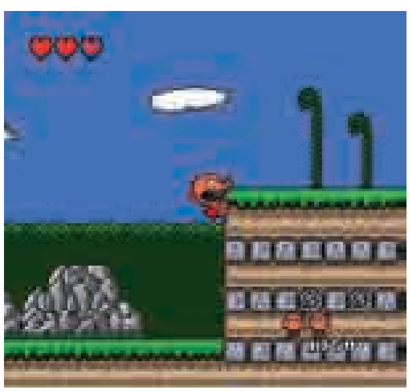
» **PUBLISHER:** HUDSON SOFT

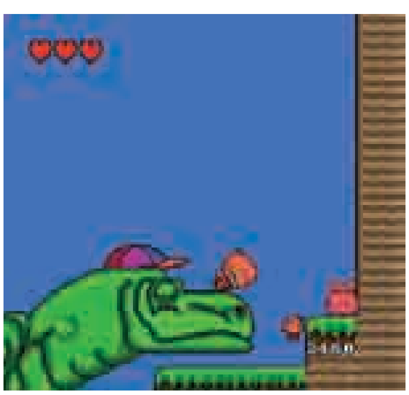
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 500

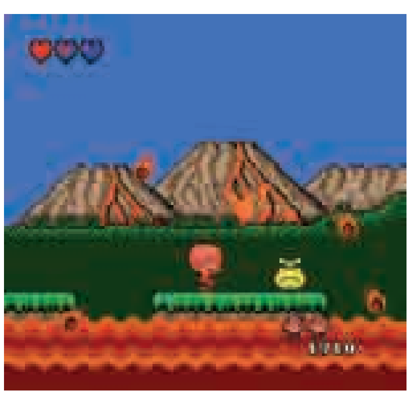
This is the first time that Hudson Soft's cute platformer has been made officially available in the UK, and while it doesn't quite boast the same impact it once had, there's no denying that there's still plenty to enjoy in this prehistoric romp.

While the actual level design is rather basic when compared to the more complex 16-bit platformers that eventually began to appear, the excellent music, comical visuals, dinosaur theme and engaging gameplay ensures that re-visiting *PC Kid* never becomes the chore it could have been. Hopefully, impressive downloads should convince Hudson Soft and Nintendo to make the rest of the franchise available.









» Why did *PC Kid* never receive an official UK release?

SUPER MARIO WORLD

INFORMATION

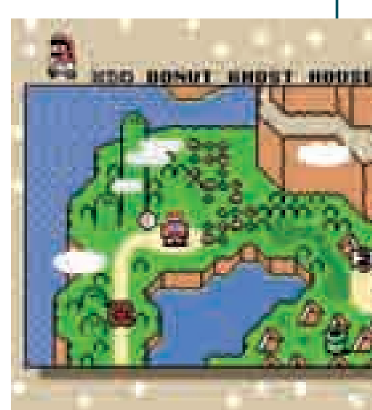
» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800

No matter how much time passes, *Super Mario World* remains at the forefront of platform gaming and after playing it again for what must now be the umpteenth time it's easy to see why it continues to be so enduringly popular. Everything about *Super Mario World* is near faultless. The level design is some of the best we've ever seen, gameplay is tighter than a duck's arse, while the breezy presentation and beautifully designed worlds are glorious to behold. And let's not forget the introduction of everyone's favourite green dinosaur… As important now as it was back in 1996.



» Every level of *Super Mario World* is a masterwork of game design.



» Don't be smug, you've a long way to go yet.

RETRORATED

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 500

Some games you can return to and instantly remember why you fell in love with them in the first place. *The Legend Of Zelda* is one such game. While the NES's humble graphic palette couldn't hope to capture the same "great outdoors" atmosphere that *Ocarina Of Time* so successfully achieved 11 years later, it still manages to hit you with a sense of wide-eyed wonderment. Exploring the world of Hyrule is as much fun now as it was back in 1987, and the many dungeons you encounter are still perfectly balanced. An excellent adventure that has successfully endured the ravages of time.



» Basic to look at, but oh so enjoyable to play through.



» Dah, dah, dah, daaaaaahhhhhh!

MARIO KART 64

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 1,000

Thanks to Xbox Live Arcade, playing old games online against other players has now become common practice, and most importantly, great fun; therefore it's somewhat saddening to learn that no Virtual Console titles currently support online play. Whilst it could be argued that you're getting to play the game in its original form, it feels like a massive oversight in the case of *Mario Kart 64*. Granted, it's been given the same new lick of paint and more stable frame-rate that *Ocarina* and *Mario 64* have been blessed with, but that's as far as it goes. A real missed opportunity.



» A great racer that now looks better than ever. If only it featured online play…



» Damn, eighth place. Where's a lightning bolt when you need it?

R-TYPE

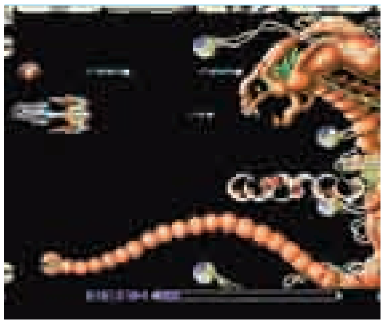
INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** HUDSON SOFT
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 500

Yes, the graphics can be quite flickery in places and the sound seems far tinnier than how we originally remembered it, but god damn if this isn't one seriously good arcade port.

The PC Engine version was always the version of choice (until the PlayStation's *R-Types* finally appeared) and you'll be pleased to know that shooting down the Bydo Empire and negotiating the brilliantly designed levels has lost none of its charm. With so many platformers and racers currently appearing on the Virtual Console's line-up it's great to see a shooter of *R-Type*'s pedigree make the launch – even if it isn't the arcade version…





» This guy is still one of the best bosses ever created.

F-ZERO

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800

Speed. Straight racing lines. Nothing else. *F-Zero* was a game without complications, contrasting starkly against other Mode-7 SNES racers like *Mario Kart*; there were no weapons and no sudden stops when you hit barriers. This isn't to criticise the kart-meister, since we adore both games, but it highlights what an excellent and complimentary alternative *F-Zero* is. Despite being flatter than its 3D successors, it still works well today. Incredibly well in fact. By not grinding to a halt when touching barriers, you always feel as if you have a chance to win. Simple, but utterly engrossing and ingenious.



» Okay, so we'd have preferred the N64 version, but this is still pretty hectic stuff.



» You've got to love those Mode 7 graphics, but where's *Mario Kart* and *Pilotwings*? that's what we want to know.

OVERALL SCORE

You may have noticed that we've not given each game individual scores. Well there's a simple reason for it. Nintendo has included so many hit games that we were loath to fill all four pages with Retro Gamer Sizzlers. Despite the odd hiccup (the lack of online play is criminal) this is everything we were hoping for. Nice one Nintendo.

OVERALL RATING 91%

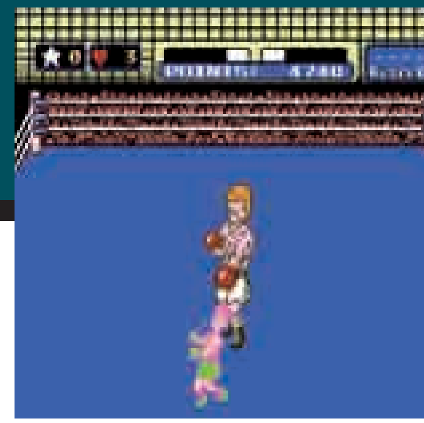
PUNCH OUT!

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 500

While it's definitely a disappointment that Nintendo hasn't made the superior SNES version available, we're still suitably pleased to see that NES classic *Punch Out!* has made the launch lineup.

Punch Out! may appear annoyingly simplistic by today's standards, but like *Excitebike* and *Metroid*, the pleasure is in the actual playing. Let us assure you that flattening a cocky opposing boxer with a couple of swift punches and then watching him wobble to the floor never gets tiring, and the comical poses and faces they all pull will constantly raise a smile in even the most jaded of gamers. A knock out.





» Now that's gotta hurt…

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800

Watching Sonic as he races through the vibrant greenery of Greenhill Zone makes you realise how far Sega's little mascot has come. His recent 3D outings may have been a consistently bitter pill for fans to swallow (although *Sonic Rivals* looks set to change that) but his first 2D adventure still manage to impress, even if it does feel a little too familiar at times. There's no denying that *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is the better game, but you can't blame Sega for wanting to get as much mileage out of its back catalogue as possible. A super platformer that's been dulled only slightly by time.



» *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* may be better, but we're hardly going to moan with Sega's first Wii download.

RETRORATED

» POSSIBLY THE GREATEST RETRO COMPILATION SO FAR

SEGA MEGA DRIVE COLLECTION

ECLIPSING THE DIGITAL WORLD





- » **SYSTEM:** PSP (ALSO PS2)
- » **PRICE:** £19.99
- » **RELEASED:** 24 NOVEMBER
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2
- » **FEATURED GAMES:**

ALEX KIDD
ALTERED BEAST
BONANZA BROS.
COLUMNS
COMIX ZONE
DECAP ATTACK
ECCO
ECCO II
ECCO JR.
FLICKY
GAIN GROUND
GOLDEN AXE
GOLDEN AXE II
GOLDEN AXE III
KID CHAMELEON
PHANTASY STAR II
PHANTASY STAR III
PHANTASY STAR IV
RISTAR
SHINOBI III
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
SUPER THUNDER BLADE
SWORD OF VERMILION
VECTORMAN
VECTORMAN 2
VIRTUA FIGHTER 2
UNLOCKABLE:
ASTRO BLASTER
TIP TOP
ELIMINATOR
SPACE FURY
SUPER ZAXXON



Retro compilations have been improving over the years, with various companies setting new precedents on what is acceptable – more games, better emulation, increased extras, more overall effort. Initially it was Taito with its second *Legends* compilation which really impressed us – washing away the bad taste left by countless other cynical cash-ins (yes, we're eyeballing you Namco). Afterwards Capcom raised the bar even higher with *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed* – which was actually developed by third-party company Digital Eclipse. *Sega Mega Drive Collection* on PSP and PS2 (PSP version tested) is also developed by Digital Eclipse, and (in this reviewer's opinion) transcends every other UK compilation out there. But how to explain its brilliance, and leave no doubt that you simply must own it, without simply resorting to interpretive dance and screaming wildly? (John practiced this in the office. Don't make him do it again, just buy the game – Ed)

It contains 27 Mega Drive and five arcade games to be unlocked



OPINION

Personal gripes aside (where the hell is *Shining Force*?) *Mega Drive Collection* is the best compilations I've seen in ages. There's literally something for everyone and it's full of great games. My pick of the bunch…definitely *Bonanza Bros*, it's still a fairly original stealth game and brilliant fun in 2-player mode.

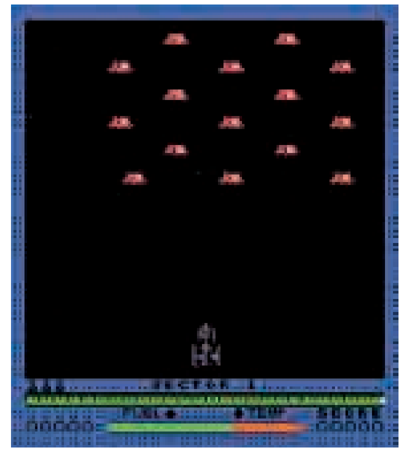
Ashley Day



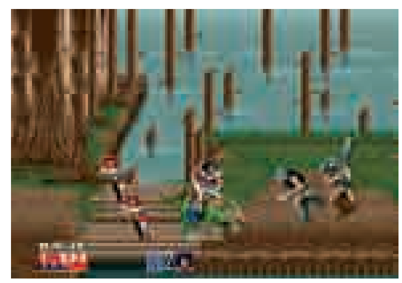
» *Kid Chameleon* was a great game about being trapped in game. Collect a variety of powers (medieval, samurai, etc), and try to reach the end.

(see side panel), ten(!) recent interviews with Sega people, trailers, cheats, general game histories and even trivia! The trivia sections are a particularly welcome addition; obviously the people creating this had a genuine understanding and passion for the subject matter. Digital Eclipse can take pride in the fact there was one or two bits of trivia which even the Retro Gamer office didn't know. But best of all, this compilation only costs 20 English pounds, which is roughly 63 pennies per game! The three *Phantasy Star* and *Ecco* games, plus *Comix Zone*, are almost worth that price alone. Almost. The fact these are mostly console games, also means there's more depth than in arcade compilations, making it easy to become immersed and play for hours. Without question this offers obscenely good value for money.

It must also be mentioned, that in many cases these games are better than the original cartridge versions. Digital Eclipse obviously realised that in order to compete against home-brew



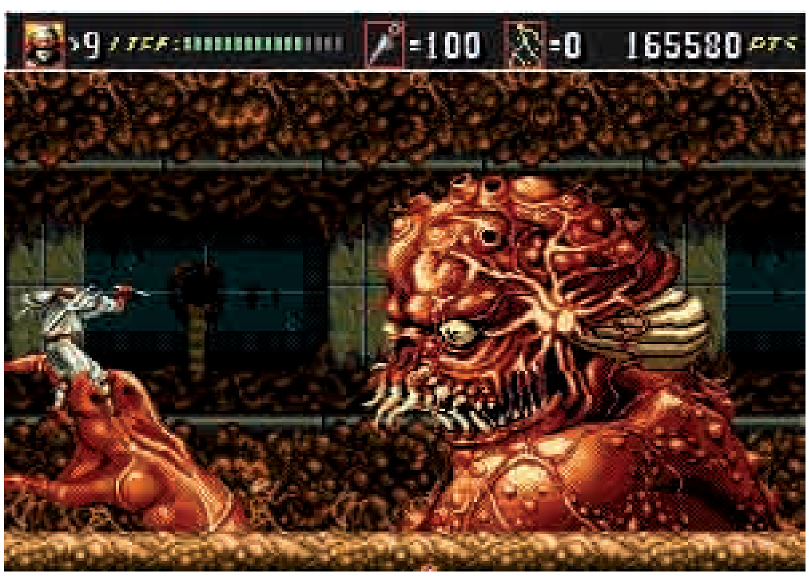
» Don't be fooled. *Astro Wars* has a surprising level of variety and depth, being one of the best games here. We love discovering obscure gems like this.



» Which *Golden Axe* is your favourite? The Retro Gamer office is split evenly over each of the three.

emulation, not only would there need to be some extra special bonus material (which there is!), but the emulation would need to be perfect and offer everything you expect to find elsewhere. Every game has various graphics aspect ratios to choose from including the original resolution, which thankfully has no interpolation or blurring – purists will no doubt be ecstatic to know this produces a faithful and super-sharp image.

All games can also be saved and loaded at any point, which not only makes the PSP version perfect for on-the-move gaming, but it means titles like *Kid Chameleon* can actually now be completed (the original lacked saving, and bordered on impossible). This is an ingenious move and makes all of the games more enjoyable



» There are two types of people. Those who prefer *Shinobi 3* over the first, and those who are simply wrong. *Shinobi 3* is clearly better – it features ninjas on jet-skis!



OPINION

Sega, through the mighty fine work of Digital Eclipse, have come forth with unquestionably the greatest retro compilation to so far engage our minds! For me, the highlight is the interviews with more than ten of Sega's key visionaries! Japanese devcos are difficult darlings to get interviews from, so this is simply divine!

Simon Phillips

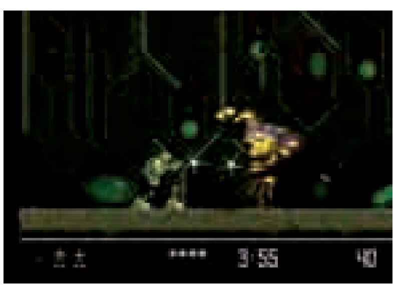


» *Phantasy Star IV* was one of the greatest RPGs released on the Mega Drive, while the music, oh god the music, was sublime.



» *Comix Zone* was a fantastic, unique brawler (you're trapped in a comic!). Sadly it had a late release and went by mostly unnoticed. We urge everyone to play it.

(especially when you don't have to scribble down passwords). Cynics might argue it makes the games too easy to complete but, considering there is over 100 hours of fresh gameplay even if you never replay old



» The *Vectorman* games were another group of Mega Drive titles which, despite being very good, were overlooked due to being released quite late.



» *Tip Top* (aka *Congo Bongo*) is one of the arcade games which can be unlocked – in this case, by collecting a chaos emerald in *Sonic*.

stages, this is a moot point. We value and appreciate this save feature, and hope it gets used in further compilations.

Of course there are small niggles which can raised, but it's the same for any newly released title. So much effort has gone into this, and the games list is so generous, that forcibly trying to find faults is pointless. Maybe they did use the slightly garish American box art instead of the better Japanese originals; maybe it is missing the *Streets Of Rage* trilogy; maybe it should have included *Magical Flying Turbo Hat Adventure* instead of *Decap Attack*, but these things don't matter. It doesn't detract from one of the very best retro compilations available in the UK, or from the immense fun of playing so many classics.

Our only serious concern is that *SMDC* might not have the high sales it deserves, which might result in companies deciding that to maximise profits they need to be less generous in future compilations. This sets such an amazing precedent, on so many levels, so hopefully it will sell well and encourage others. We'd actually score it higher, but want to give everyone else something to aim for. If you have even a vague interest in the Mega Drive you need to buy this immediately. In fact, buy two copies and give one to a friend. It is outstanding.

IN SUMMARY

Fantastic. Amazing. So brilliant it makes us weep profusely into our beards. Excellent games, perfect presentation, and all at a crazy low price.

RATING **96%**



» The hauntingly eerie *Ecco* games work surprisingly well on the PSP. Being trapped in underwater caverns and the small screen go together splendidly.



» The big highlight is ten interviews with key people at Sega. They chat about the 16-bit era, old *Phantasy Star* games, creating *Golden Axe*, and more. Awesome.

BARGAIN HUNT

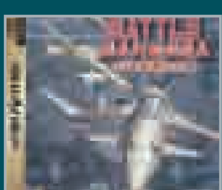
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japan auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over 100 different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it!

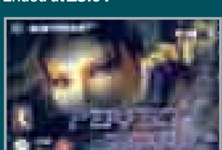
RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. If something has sold for a staggeringly high amount of money (or lower than it normally would) you'll find them listed here.

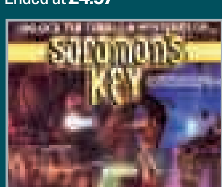
BATTLE GAREGGA
SEGA SATURN
Normally sells for **£80+**
Ended at **£37.51**



PERFECT DARK
N64 (FULLY BOXED)
Normally sells for **£10+**
Ended at **23.01**



SOLOMON'S KEY
ZX SPECTRUM
Normally sells for **£0.50**
Ended at **£4.57**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**



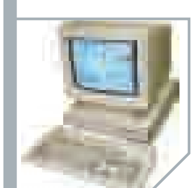
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

ACORN



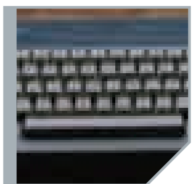
ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (with games)**

Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**

Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

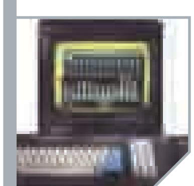
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**

Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**

Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- RENEGADE
- RICK DANGEROUS
- GRYZOR



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**

Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE



APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) (with games)**

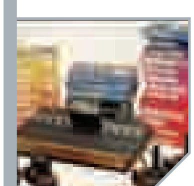
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built machine and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+**

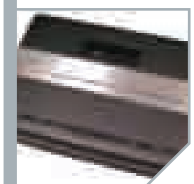
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

- ROCKING HORSE SHIT
- HEN'S TEETH
- LUCKY FIND
- EBAY REGULAR
- CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



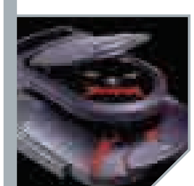
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

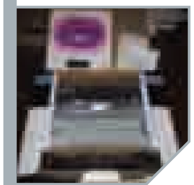


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

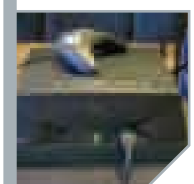
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) (prices fluctuate wildly)**
Ultra rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



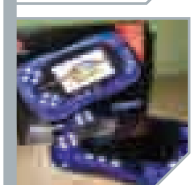
PIPPIN(ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. It's high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) (more with games, depending on model)**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore, that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models, with differing specs, the Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the best selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND



C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

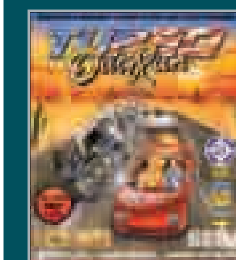


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

TEMPEST 2000
SEGA SATURN
Normally sells for **£10+**
Ended at **£26.49**



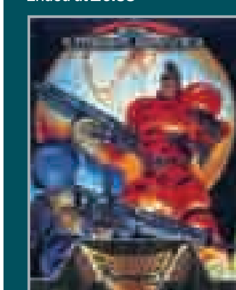
TURBO OUTRUN
COMMODORE 64
Normally sells for **£0.50**
Ended at **£5.01**



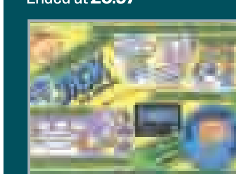
FANTASY ZONE
MASTER SYSTEM
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£2.48**



FORGOTTEN WORLDS
MEGA DRIVE
Normally sells for **£2+**
Ended at **£0.53**



JACK THE NIPPER
SPECTRUM
Normally Sells for **£1**
Ended at **£8.97**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32

» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.

- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20

» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**

The computer that established Commodore brand.

- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**

Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



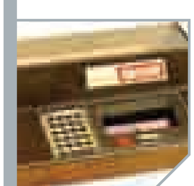
FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**

A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive, (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!

- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE

» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.

- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



BARCODE BATTLER

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**

Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…

–Magnum Durex 3 pack
– Knave October '93 Issue
– Kleenex 3-Ply



CASIO LOOPY

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

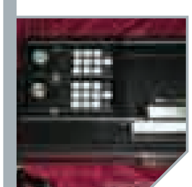
More inanity from the land of the rising sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F

» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (from the USA)**

The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**

Coleco's third generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.

-CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64

» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) (very cheap on eBay)**

Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.

- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Failed console by Emerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.

- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION

» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

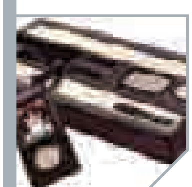
Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION

» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, which was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION

» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**

Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.

- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY

» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products Internation. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.

- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**

Another attempt by Sony to enter the videogame hardware market (after the MSX), this time they took over the market. There are countless undocumented yet excellent PS games. Was later re-released as the PSOne, which is more expensive, but looks much nicer in design.

- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPE

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) (allegedly for a mint system)**

Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupe was a unique 8-bit British home computer which didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.

- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



SUPERVISION

» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM

» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.

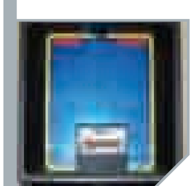
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)

» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Series of old computers by Tomy.

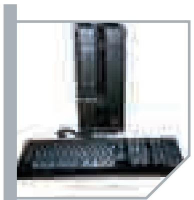


VECTREX (MB/GCE)

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**

The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.

- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent homebrew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER

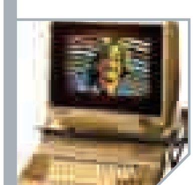


MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

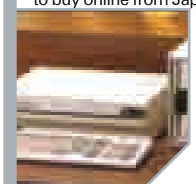
NEC



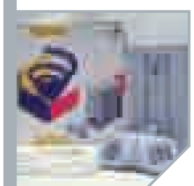
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of very cool Japanese games for it. Released in the USA as the NEC Trek. While fairly cheap, be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two system's Hu-Cards are not mutually compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) (massive fluctuations)**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- BLOODY WOLF
- NINJA SPIRIT



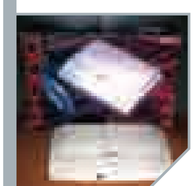
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) (prices can fluctuate)**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had 6 games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.

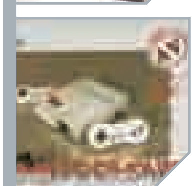


DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a 6 button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over a 1000 games to choose from!



FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.



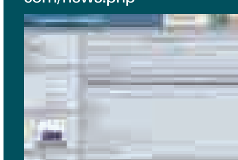
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned,

RETRO GAMING SITES

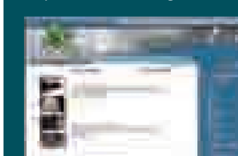
SEGA GAGA DOMAIN
The site owner likes nothing more than tracking down Japanese Sega games. Featuring mini reviews of every featured game, Sega Gaga is also the home of Retro Core: an excellent video show that gives an insight into Japanese gaming. www.segagagadomain.com/welcome-news.htm



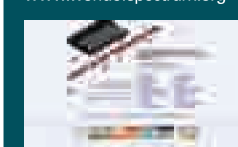
REPLACEMENT DOCS
We've all lost games manuals over the years, so a site that tries to document instruction books is bound to be popular. Pretty much every computer and console you can think of has support, and more are being added all the time. A great resource site. http://www.replacementdocs.com/news.php



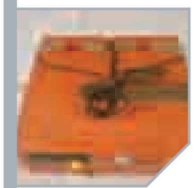
FINAL FANTASY NET
If you're a *Final Fantasy* fan, head to the wonderful Final Fantasy Net. Featuring information on every released game, you'll also find a forum, a chat room and news on the staggeringly popular series. Absolutely essential. http://www.ffnet.org/



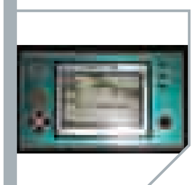
WORLD OF SPECTRUM
Even if you have only a passing interest in Sir Clive's machine, you'll find World Of Spectrum to be one of the best websites around. The archives actually allow you to play many classics online, making for a great experience. www.worldofspectrum.org



the drive belts break very easily.



SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



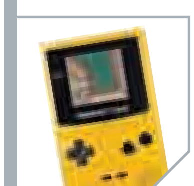
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite it's age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact GB, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic GB. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



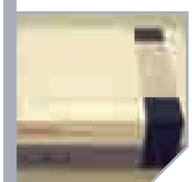
GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of their cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72 pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of their most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JPN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



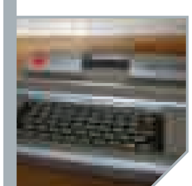
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips.The 200 series consists of front loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (more with DVC)**
Consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000, that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



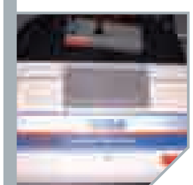
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance it's capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- CRAZY TAXI
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. Could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc.**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (according to eBay)**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer

hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» » PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

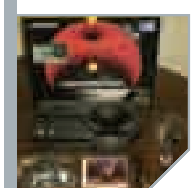


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
CDX/Xeye
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (more with games)**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook style boxes.

- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR. AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse, that despite an amazing catalogue of games never really took off.

- SATURN BOMBERMAN
- GUARDIAN HEROES
- DRAGON FORCE

SINCLAIR

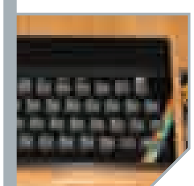


ZX-80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) Apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
-SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



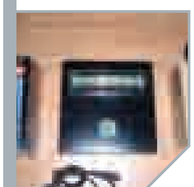
ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, it was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEOGEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High powered home system by SNK. Features many high quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEOGEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) (multi-slot systems cost more)**
High powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of NeoGeo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted).

- METAL SLUG
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- WAKU WAKU 7

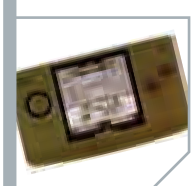


NEOGEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEOGEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based NeoGeo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of NeoGeo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has slightly improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHOWDOWN RPG



NEOGEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

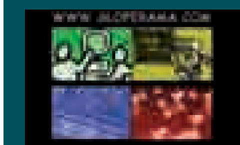


NEOGEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld NeoGeo systems by SNK, that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

RETRO GAMING SITES

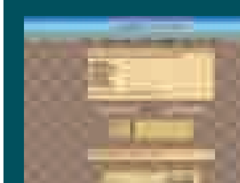
SLOPERAMA
If you enjoyed this month's article on classic card game *Hanafuda*, check out Sloperama. Created by Tom Sloper, the programmer behind Vectrex titles such as *Spike* and *Bedlam*, Sloperama has a dedicated section about the ancient card game and covers everything from detailed rules to pictures. If card games don't interest you then check out Tom's superb Q&A about game design. http://sloperama.com/



OUTRUN.ORG
We're huge fans of Sega's arcade racer and when we're not playing *Coast 2 Coast* we can be found browsing this website. Outrun.org features detailed info on each *OutRun* game and the various home conversions, quizzes, origami cars to make and much more besides. Whether you've been playing *OutRun* since its 1986 release or have just been introduced to the sequel you'll find Outrun.org to be full of essential information. http://outrun.org/new/index.html



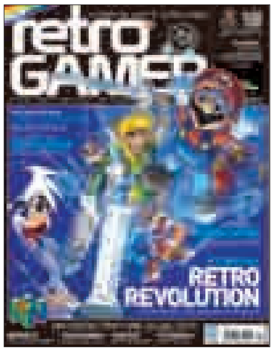
ARCADE HISTORY
Want to what was the first arcade game to use a 32-bit TMS34010 processor? Really, you do? Well you'll want to be visiting Arcade History. Maintained by Alexis Bousiges, the site provides hundreds of facts about every arcade game you could think of. If you're interested in the processor answer, it's Spencer Williams' *NARC*. www.arcade-history.com



Special thanks to **lofi-gaming-org.uk** who supplied several of our screenshots

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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STAR LETTER!

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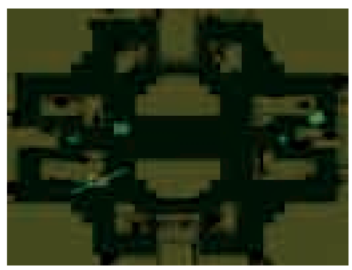
Dear Retro Gamer,

Hi there, long time gamer, first time writer. I propose that you knowledgeable guys at Retro Gamer start a feature where suffering gamers like myself can ask you guys for help (we do, it's called the letters page – Ed).

Anyway, I would dearly love to locate a game I first played around 25 years ago in our local arcade. I seem to remember it was a four-player affair (although it may have been two-player) with two teams. It was a wire frame game, very much like the brilliant *Asteroids*. Each player had a tank-like vehicle and the idea was to shoot other vehicles as a team, although you could shoot your partner. It had all sorts of obstacles and moving targets to distract you from your mission, and was very good fun. I know it's a very vague description, but that's all I have. The game was only in my local arcade for a brief amount of time, so I plead you guys for some help.

Regards, Andrew

Well, we've had a long hard think about this Andrew, and we think (only think mind) that the game you're describing might be Cinamatronics' Armor Attack. *If any of our readers think it could be something different then please write in and put Andrew out of his misery. In the meantime have this month's star prize for getting one over on us.*



HOME-BREW HELP

Dear Retro Gamer,

I finally took the plunge and bought my first ever copy of your magazine, mainly because I wanted to read the Jaguar article (this letter has taken a while to arrive, the Post Office strikes again – Ed).

I remember desperately wanting a Jaguar when they first came out, but I never actually got around to buying one. Now, thanks to your fantastic article I'm finally going to go to track one down, and I'm going to make a special effort to track down the games in the perfect ten.

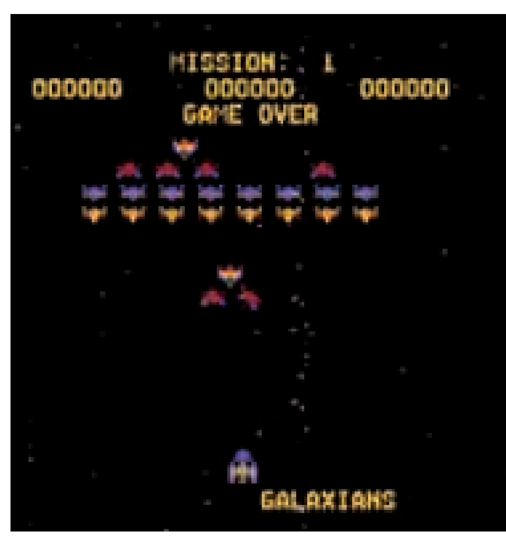
One other thing I noticed in the issue was that you feature a list of all the old consoles and computers, most of which I remember or actually own. Why not extend this feature by making a list of great games for a specific system each month? It would be incredibly useful, as we'd all know what we should and shouldn't spend our money on.

Also, many times during the Jaguar article, you referred to home production of games; now this is something I'm very interested in. If I wanted to start making Jaguar games what tools and software would I need?

Many thanks and keep up the great work,

Chris Vickers

Welcome aboard the good ship Retro Gamer Chris. If you head on over to http://www.jaysmith2000.com you'll be able to find documents and a friendly forum of members that will be more than eager to help out budding new programmers. As for the buyers guide… well, watch this proverbial space.



» *Gorf* on the Jaguar is probably the best conversion available.

GRAPHICS RULE

Dear Retro Gamer,

I was never into the first Game Boy because I couldn't stand its poor quality screen and the fact that it wasn't in colour. I had an Atari Lynx II and would happily sit next to the power socket while I played games like *Blue Lightning* and *S.T.U.N. Runner*. As the games dried up on the Lynx I moved across to the Game Gear – colour and power once again made me miss out on the Game Boy. The same is true today and I now own a PSP. I'd only consider a black DS Lite if it had a little more 3D kick – and then it hit me, why can't ATI or some other graphics company build a Super FX-styled chip that would fit neatly into the GBA cartridge slot of the DS? ATI have been buddies with Nintendo for ages now, so surely something could be done about this? What do you think?

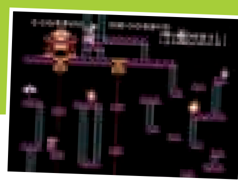
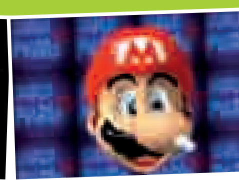
Steve Derby

Personally speaking, we don't think that the DS needs any sort of graphical enhancements at all (we're sure some readers out there would disagree). Basically, if all you want is fancy graphics then you may as well get yourself a PSP (as you've already done). On the other hand, if you're after a machine that offers innovative content and a fun new way of playing games then you're best bet is a DS Lite. Simple really.





EVERY MONTH ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy Retro Gamer T-Shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a Sega Mega Drive Plug 'N Play pack. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls; failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…




FROM THE FORUM

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW: WHAT MAKES NINTENDO GAMES SO SPECIAL? HERE ARE A FEW OF YOUR REPLIES.

ID: paranoid marvin
Obvious answer. You can't play them on any other system.

ID: Sabreman
I honestly don't think they're anymore special than the best games from other developers. However, one thing they do tend to get spot on is second-guessing exactly the kind of things that a player will try to do in-game, and rewarding them for it.

ID: Mayhem
It's the uncanny ability to perfectly balance the aspects of fun, challenge, excitement, replayability and control into a homogenous whole, something that very few other developers seem capable of over the last 20 years.

ID: paranoid marvin
Nintendo design games specifically for its controllers, to make movement feel natural and smooth.

ID: potboy
Shigeru Miyamoto is a programming GOD! Can never find a single bug anywhere in his stuff!

ID: Smurph
Because they manage to present the same old franchises multiple times, yet I still lap them up – so, reinvention, I guess.

ID: monkey puzzle
They stick to a tried and tested formula but improve on it every time. Just look at the *Mario* and *Zelda* games for example.

ID: pantal00ns
Nintendo games all have one good thing in common.... They all involve a moustached bloke who can fix your bog.

ID: Sega2006
They manage to make games that all ages can play. All right, some of the newer games can seem babyish but they are only trying to be family-orientated, hence lack of blood, guts and gore from most of their titles.

ID: Delboy
The colours dude, always so colourful with bubbly characters, you play a Nintendo game you smile, oh damn that *Resident Evil*...

ID: roberthazleby
It's the fact that you never have to read the instruction manual when playing a Nintendo game, as everything is gently explained as you progress through the title. Sure, the instruction booklet is there should you need it, but Nintendo seems to have mastered the way of getting the player up to speed with the controls and the method of play whilst you're actually playing the game. It's a trait that other software companies have only recently started to follow.

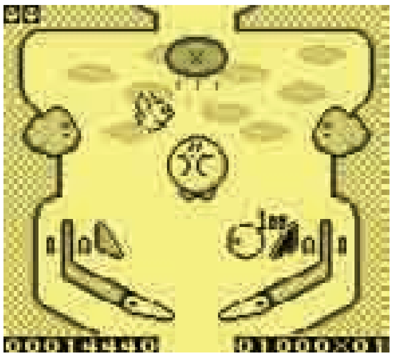
ID: The Last Ginja
I don't think they are special; they rehash everything, and flog every franchise they have to near death.
Having said that I've owned every console they've made since the original Game Boy so they must be doing something right...

ID: Opa-Opa
Family fun, Nintendo games are great to sit and play through together...

ID: Cornelius
It puts more effort into its games than anybody else, it has a taste for perfection, it raises the bar time and time again which proves it really know what it's doing and I'm absolutely certain that the game industry would fall apart completely without Nintendo.

ID: The Duke
Just look at the Wii: Nintendo make games for everybody and it's not scared to do something different. Hoorah for innovation.

ID: Dadilus
I can give them to my kids. They're not just for testosterone-fuelled sociopaths. Not all blood and guts.



» If you have a spare copy of *Kirby's Pinball Land* on the Game Boy let Dave Compton know, he's desperate for it.

GAMER SEEKS GAME

Dear Retro Gamer,

Please help me. I'm a diehard fan when it comes to retro games, especially those that appeared on the Mega Drive, SNES and original Game Boy. I'm looking for a selection of games and want them so badly, but I'm not sure where I'll be able to find them. Would you know where I could find the following games?

Dragon Warrior 1 & *II* (Game Boy)
Mega Man II (Game Boy)
Kirby's Pinball (Game Boy)
Wario Land (Game Boy)
Demon's Crest (SNES)
Illusion Of Time (SNES)
Terranigma (SNES)
Super Metroid (SNES)
Super Castlevania IV (SNES)
Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss (SNES)

Kindest regards,
Dave Compton

Well, there's a number of way to track your games down Dave. Your first port of call should obviously be eBay, as you should be



» *Wario Land* on the Game Boy. Now you know what to look for.

able to find pretty much anything you want. Of course, the only downside to that is that you can get caught in bidding wars for rare titles, and could end up paying more than

THE RETRO FORUM



» Paul Cook wants more obscure games in Retro Gamer. Do you?

you originally wanted to. Otherwise why not try our very own forum? People are always selling and trading in the Off Topic forum, so you may strike lucky there.

ALMOST PERFECT

Greetings Retro Gamer,

I've been an obsessive gamer since the age of three and have worked my way through a countless number of games. I initially started off on a Mega Drive and Master System and… (this goes on and on, but he does have a point – Ed.)

… Thankfully, after the traumatizing disappearance from the shelves of Retro Gamer for a few months, your almost perfect periodical became even better. The coverdisc was gone, the covers lost their "rustic" look and the coverage of foreign and console games increased. You almost have the perfect magazine.

I said almost, because I am a perfectionist. So I've included a few suggestions that should make your magazine better than ever.

1) More info on how older games are played and less about how it felt to actually play them. Possibly expand the Classic Game and Retro Revivals into mini reviews.

2) Stop talking about the bootleg industry! Not meaning to sound like the BBFC, but games piracy harms legitimate developers, like Nintendo and Konami, stopping them producing as many great games.

3) Write a little more about some of the more obscure titles of yesteryear. I know you need to show people games they remember, but I always crave new games.

4) A feature, or maybe even a regular piece, showing and reviewing the earlier games in a successful, still running series, such as the *Metal Gear* series or *Final Fantasy* or *Resident Evil*.

5) In a similar vein to point 4, interviews with the men who are still in the industry and have been there for decades wouldn't go amiss. I know Shigeru Miyamoto is a very busy man and that Hideo Kojima doesn't speak English, but just imagine if they were in the mag… It might even top the first Retro Gamer interview with Matthew Smith!

6) Your features have always been great, and I wish you the best of luck.

Thanks for the magazine, which has (slightly) changed my life and thanks for reading this very long letter.

Paul Cook

Here goes Paul:

1) We try to keep a balance between detail and nostalgia, the two articles you mentioned are the nostalgia led ones.

2) The bootleg industry is part of our culture whether you like it or not. Sadly, not talking about it isn't going to make it go away.

3) We do this with both Full of Eastern Promise and Why You Must Play. Please remember that not all of our readership wants to read a six-page article about a game they've never heard of. Balance is the key.

4) This has been covered in the magazine before under Retro Revival. Maybe we'll return to it…

5) Good idea, but it's often very hard to speak to these people as most (not all) only wish to talk about new games they are currently working on.

6) Thanks very much.

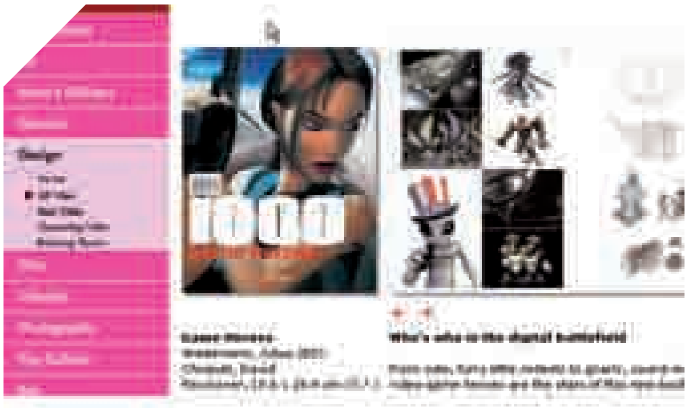
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RETRO SCENE

IT'S CERTAINLY BEEN A BUSY MONTH. MIKE TOOLEY LOOKS AT NAMCO'S MOBILE PHONE GAMES, A GREAT NEW BOOK AND ONE OF THE CRAZIEST GAMES EVER MADE.

A THOUSAND GAMING HEROES ARE GATHERING

A CALL TO ARMS



» As you can see, the artwork for 1000 Gaming Heroes is superb, and it features many exclusive pictures.

News reaches Retro Gamer this month that David Choquet's opus has finally been released. For those of you who don't recognise the name, Choquet is a gaming magazine industry legend in France and he has edited many of the bestselling French magazines throughout his illustrious career.

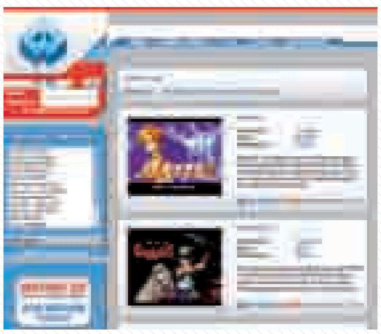
For the last two years he has been working for Taschen Books writing and researching 1000 Gaming Heroes.

The book takes the form of a videogame encyclopaedia, featuring over a thousand games and their characters. An absolute must-have for any Retro fans, 1000 Gaming Heroes chronicles the evolution of games, designers and their subsequent characters. With intros to each section written by the games creators, an explanation of the design process, detailed game information, commercial statistics and unreleased character art it would seem that David has created a one-stop resource of gaming reference, providing an essential companion to Internet retro-gaming forum users everywhere.

Retro Gamer is already looking forward to forum posts quoting page numbers and paragraphs. Released as Retro Gamer goes to press 1000 Gaming Heroes really is a work of art, and will be available in most good book shops or direct from http://www.taschen.com/pages/en/catalogue/books/digital/all/facts/03314.htm.

THE LONG DELAYED WOOMB FINALLY RAIDS THE MSX BACK CATALOGUE

WOOMB RAIDER



» **Left:** Woomb shows amazing potential, let's hope many other companies re-release old titles for it. **Below:** *Golvellius*: a charming adventure that can now be enjoyed at a great price.



After what seems like far more than the two years it has actually taken, we are delighted to be able to announce that Woomb.net has finally thrown open its website to the gaming masses this month.

For those in the dark, Woomb is a website making retro games from around the world available to everyone. Running on a subscription only basis the cost to subscribe is so cheap that no self respecting retro gamer should be without it. Costing just 2.99 Euros a month or 29 Euros a year, Woomb delivers the best value-for-money service currently available to retro gamers the world over. This is not a ROM site, all the games have been tailored to run on Windows, Linux and the Mac OS and are stand-alone downloads that run through the Woomb launcher. There's no more need for tricky emulators or ambiguous "where r da roms?" requests, because Woomb is finally a perfect example of retro gaming becoming a legitimate and viable business enterprise.

14 games are currently available and all are of a great quality, and range from the well known, *Super Aleste* and *Hydlide* to some more obscure titles that even our Editor wouldn't be aware of, like *Golvellius*, a great RPG, and *DASS* a Japan-only release in the Eighties that plays very much like *Thunder Force 2*.

Of the first games released most are MSX 2 games, the first home for many games that became massive franchises on Sega and Nintendo's early machines. Hailing from such familiar retro games companies as T and E soft and Compile Games, it is reassuring to know that the original developers receive a royalty payment. Another strength of the system is that because of the input of creators, levels, features and characters that were dropped from the original releases have been reinstated, so it's possible that games such as the forthcoming *Snatcher* may contain the missing third chapter that never appeared in the original MSX release. Available from http://www.woomb.net/ this really is an exciting breakthrough.

IT'S GOOD TO PLAY

NAMCO LOOKS AT HARMONISING TECHNOLOGIES

News has reached Retro gamer this month that Namco is setting up a retro gaming tournament in association with Motorola. The games tournament will play out amongst attendees at this year's Digital Life and Entertainment Show. Interestingly, Namco see this as a great chance to market Namco games and is using this as the backbone of a marketing campaign across the United States as Retro Gamer goes to press.

The games in question are both seminal classics, *Pac-Man* and *Galaga*, and are due for download on Motorola's new SLVR handset. Both titles are already available on various phones already in the UK and have also appeared on home systems such as Plug 'N Play packs and Xbox Live Arcade. Namco is really leading the pack at the moment in terms of bringing classic games to mobile phones with its latest title *Ridge Racer Mobile* being yet another example of Namco's dedication to the mobile market. "At Namco, games are first and foremost," exclaimed Masaji Okubo, Namco's web and Mobile executive director. "We truly understand gameplay, having created some of the most-played games of all time. Our web and mobile division is extremely well positioned for platform convergence; we have the vision and global strength required to fulfil the expectations of our clients, and keep growing this exciting business across Europe."

The march of our gaming history continues…

» Just a few of Namco's many classic games, now fully mobile.



NOT JOANIE LOVES CHACHI…

MUSKEDUNDER ANNOUNCE A CRAZY NEW RELEASE

Shiver me timbers and hoist the Jolly Roger in celebration. It would appear that Muskedunder's barmy *Ninja Loves Pirate* is to receive a full release.

Few games have had such wide appeal, featuring ninjas, pirates, zombies and aliens the retro heritage on display is amazing and certainly ticks more boxes than most on the who's who of gaming villainy list, while also managing to offer gamers something new at the same time. No wonder then that Darran has decreed that everyone needs to bring a parrot to work and has insisted that John call him Captain Jones, while threatening all and sundry with a long walk over his short plank.

As the winner of the 2006 Gamedev.net four elements competition *Ninja Loves Pirate* already has a fine pedigree despite the full version still being incomplete. Initially taking on the role of Blackbeard the pirate or Ichiro the ninja, the game shapes up as a side-scrolling platform adventure come beat-'em-up, reminiscent in its style of animation and backdrops of Capcom's 16-bit *Aladdin*. The developers are at the moment sighting many influences from *Pirates Of The Caribbean*, *Samurai Shodown*, through to Romero's many zombie flicks. Where all this will end is anybody's guess, but as the game starts with Blackbeard's ship being sunk by an asteroid, his crew being eaten by zombies, and an ongoing dysfunctional relationship with his ninja ally, Retro Gamer has high hopes that there will be laughs a plenty as the bodies start to pile up in what looks to be a sensational retro-themed release. Look out for more details in Retro Gamer next month. If you can't wait there is a demo available for download here: www.ninjalovespirate.com.



» Sometimes it's not saying I love you that counts, it's the little things we do.

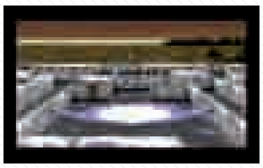
RETRO SCENE

TAKING A LOOK AT THE BEST HOME-BREW GAMES AROUND. THIS MONTH, NEWCOMER AND TANK WARS.

NEWCOMER

A TALE WITH A STING

- » **FORMAT:** C64
- » **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** CID
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** PROTOVISION
- » **PRICE:** 35 EUROS
- » **REVIEWED BY:** MIKE TOOLEY



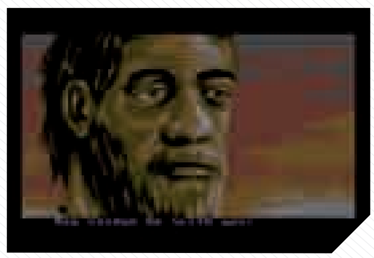
***Newcomer* is a game with a tale. It paints the story rather than tell it; lucid graphics colour a world every bit as ambiguous and dark as the neon lit streets of a Phillip K Dick noir. Beginning as you do almost as an observer trying to make sense of your character and the world in which they inhabit, rarely does a game have the ability to make you feel as uncomfortable as this one.**

Shaping up as a new twist of the role-playing game *Newcomer*'s influences are easy to see but hard to quantify; the creators sight *Neuromancer* and *Dragon Wars* as inspiration, but there are unconsciously dark shades of *Lovecraft* in there too. The intro shows your character, Neil, waking on a prison island, and throws in flashbacks of the crime that put him there. It's vague but within minutes you realise survival and understanding are going to be the fundamentals to the game set on an island inhabited by religious sects, psychopaths and dangerous indigenous animals.

In true RPG style the NPCs that inhabit the island need to be engaged, and this drives the plot and develops the character's skill set. Starting the game naked allows you to really feel Neil's growth as he becomes stronger. The first battle that you win is a real watershed in the game.

The music shows the SID chip for the capable hardware that it was – eerie ambience creates a bleak futuristic sound trap that adds to the feeling of being lost, and as *Newcomer* reveals more of itself, lends itself well to the more action-orientated encounters.

Newcomer's look is hard to place, in places cyber punk, at times future real, occasionally barren but always atmospheric, some of the artwork on display here are among the best seen on the CBM 64. The interface and controls are simple and as such the player becomes an automaton, absorbed by the game.



» Who would have thought that we'd have two high scoring C64 games within a month of each other? We didn't.



» Yes, this really is a Commodore 64 screenshot. Looks amazing doesn't it?

As the game progresses the usual RPG options become available allowing NPCs to join Neil's party, but the choice lies with the player, Neil can solo the game if he chooses.

Truly epic in every way *Newcomer* should be experienced by anybody who has even a passing interest in gaming, old or young.

RATING: **95%**

TANK WARS

METAL MADNESS

- » **FORMAT:** AMIGA
- » **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** GRAHAM HUMPHREY
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** ALTERNATE REALITIES
- » **REVIEWED BY:** MIKE TOOLEY



» Granted it looks very basic, but Graham Humphrey's *Tank Wars* is damned good fun to play

Tanks. Versatile weapons of destruction that interestingly for videogames have been largely underused. Times move on and now the Japanese and Americans like their tanks to stand up and answer to the name mech. Retro Gamer still loves good old-fashioned turret and caterpillar tracked tanks.

Lucky for us then that so does Graham Humphrey and we were more than happy to receive his latest game *Tank Wars* for the Amiga.

Honing in on what the subject matter does best, *Tank Wars* pits 1 to 5 players against each other in an arena, last man standing wins.

The arenas are shaped like grids and each player starts at the same time, pummelling their opponent with their cannon artillery. Added to the mix are various power-ups that affect the tank's attributes, speed up or increase the power of the tank's shots, or increase its armour. This is offset with power-downs, which have the reverse effect of lessening the tank's shot power and speed and can reduce armour. The power-downs add so much to the game it's amazing that we haven't seen much more of it down the years. The multiplayer game is significantly enhanced through it, as players vie for the strongest armoury while pushing opponents toward items that will power their tank down.

Each grid is beset with obstacles that make temporary cover for the players, but the game moves so fast and is so high-octane that attack is usually the only way of ensuring defeat.

Well-defined sprites depict the tanks and their surroundings, but functionality wins out over splendour. It's the same with the sound, although the big tank explosion embarrasses the weak cannon sound. This doesn't detract though, and serves to create an uncluttered environment. Where pyrotechnics might have stood there is just straightforward hard-nosed gameplay. Like Vin Diesel this game is fast and furious especially as the tanks start to lose there armour; the passions stirred in players is quite mesmerising.

With league play on offer too, this is surely one of the Amiga's multiplayer triumphs and should be viewed as a minor classic and revered along with *Death Tank* and the VCS classic *Combat*.

RATING: **85%**





EVERY MONTH WE LOOK AT OUR FAVOURITE REMAKES; THIS MONTH IT'S RICK DANGEROUS II AND VICTORY ROAD.

Remake of the Month

RICK DANGEROUS II

One of Core Designs very earliest characters gets the remake treatment this month and it's a pleasure to see it back, as the man behind the remake, PJ Crossley, has done a terrific job.

Rick Dangerous II was the brilliant 1990 sequel to the infamous *Rick Dangerous* and featured a number of changes from the *Indiana Jones*-themed original. For a start, Rick Dangerous's trademark archaeology appendages were replaced by a natty new space suit and the overall feel of the game was like a bizarre cross between the distinctly kitsch stylings of *Flash Gordon* and the chaotic loonyness of *Marvin The Martian*. It certainly had its own uniqe charms.

As for the back-story, well it takes place immediately after the events at the end of the first game and has Rick rushing to Hyde Park after he's told that it will be attacked by evil aliens. (Frankly, going around with a name like Rick Dangerous, he deserves all he gets.)

Gone is the reactive gameplay of the first instalment and in its place subtle gunplay that is underpinned by the use of bombs to aid Rick as he traverses some of the meanest platform environments ever conceived. Rick traverses parks, ice caverns, mud mines and forests in his pursuit of his nemesis, The Fat Guy.

The graphics are bright and lively, and display Rick's environments in a clichéd yet well conceived styling; ice is depicted by white, mud is depicted by brown, but that's all it needs.

Sound effects are omnipresent throughout – over the top screams, bomb noises and laser fire go someway to illustrating the pastiche that Rick is a part of, sitting along with an cluttered music score, though none of this detracts from the overall architecture of the game. At its most basic *Rick Dangerous II* is a platform and ladders game, at its best it is one of the most cunning and devious logic games you could play, requiring puzzle-solving before you can actually traverse the ladders and jumps.

There is unfortunately no joystick option here, and the controls require learning only because they are not the norm, but *Rick Dangerous II* remains cohesive and obscenely addictive and is deserving of anyone's time. Be warned though you may never see the secret level 5, such is the intense difficulty curve.

RATING **80%**

BEING DANGEROUS IS A FULL-TIME JOB

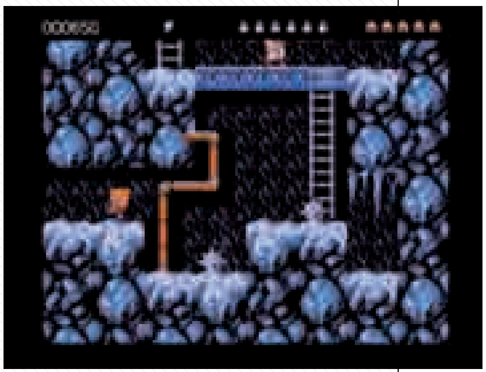
» Don't be fooled, this isn't the original Core game but it certainly looks like it.



- **FORMAT:** WINDOWS
- **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- **DEVELOPED BY:** PJ CROSSLEY
- **DOWNLOADED FROM:** HTTP://MYSITE.WANADOO-MEMBERS.CO.UK/FREEWARE01/PJSHOME.HTM
- **REVIEWED BY:** MIKE TOOLEY



» Poor old Rick. When will he learn that leaping over contaminated barrels is dangerous?



» Some may consider this remake to be so identical, as to be completely pointless. We're loving it though.

VICTORY ROAD



» It's a great remake, but you're going to need a powerful PC to do it justice.

- **FORMAT:** PC (HIGH SYSTEM REQUIRED)
- **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- **DEVELOPED BY:** KEVIN ROBINSON
- **AVAILABLE FROM:** WWW.VICTORY-ROAD.CO.UK
- **REVIEWED BY:** MIKE TOOLEY

EVERYBODY'S A WINNER

Kevin Robinson's *Victory Road* is one of the more ambitious remakes of recent times. Choosing to emulate one of the most successful driving games of all time, and a real powerhouse of a machine to boot, *Daytona* was never going to be an easy ride for anyone.

The first thing that hits home when *Victory Road* loads is how authentic everything feels. Sure, the music is different, but it still retains the loud and brash style of the original game. Fortunately, the announcer is more authentic and as the game starts you fervently hope that Robinson has been able to capture everything that made the original game so good.

Hit the start button and the Hornet appears and then you're on the first track. It's *Daytona*'s oval, and suddenly you're twelve years younger. What Robinson has done is look at the strengths of the original game, got as near to it as Dark Basic would allow and embellished it to create one of the most complete remake packages Retro Gamer has seen in a long time.

Graphically *Victory Road*'s cars are very close to its arcade parents, while the backdrops and tracks are more akin to the Saturn's home version. The music, although not all from the original game, makes for a very strong soundtrack, and probably has more copyright infringement than a MAME convention. The sound effects aren't as strong as the sources – the grunt and growl of the Hornet's high revving engine for example has now been replaced by something far softer, but that doesn't really matter.

Despite lacking the raw power of the original what Robinson has delivered here is special; its not just about the game, sure the cars handle well, the opponents are challenging and it plays out as a very solid racer; its about the community he's managed to create: online scoreboards, tips, tricks, track secrets and best of all Mr Puffy.

Bundled with humour this is a must-have download, if only so you can race the Hornet through Margate. Take it for what it is, download it and be very, very happy.

RATING **88%**



» Ooh, it's 1994 all over again.



» A superb update that perfectly captures the spirit of the original game.

retro GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

EVENT HOSTING retro GAMER

IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because Retro Gamer looks to the past that doesn't mean that there aren't games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list.



NOVEMBER '06

EA REPLAY

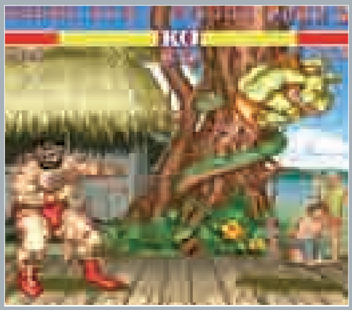
Released: 10 November

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

It was only a matter of time before EA raided its back catalogue and announced its first retro compilation. Boasting a wide variety of genres, *EA Replay* is set to include all three *Road Rash* titles, *Desert Strike, Syndicate, Wing Commander* and *Ultima: The Black Gate.* Prepare to be disappointed Amiga and PC fans, as it appears that all the games in question will be either SNES or Mega Drive ports.



NOVEMBER '06

CAPCOM CLASSIC COLLECTION: RELOADED

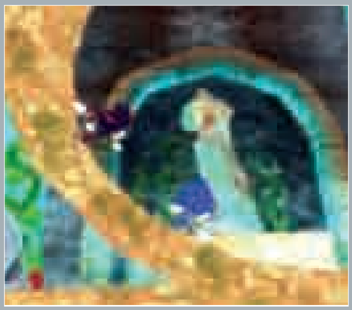
Released: 10 November

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Capcom pushes ahead with its second PSP compilation (third if you count the US only Capcom Puzzle World) and like Remix it's looking mighty fine. Stalwart regulars such as Ghouls 'N Ghosts, Commando and Street Fighter II will be sharing UMD space with more unusual titles such as the wonderful Eco Fighters and The King Of Dragons. We can't wait.



NOVEMBER '06

SONIC RIVALS

Released: 17 November

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Sonic's had a somewhat rough ride since his first 3D adventure appeared on the Dreamcast, so we're pleased to say that *Sonic Riders* looks like it will share far more in common with the DS's excellent *Sonic Rush.* Utilising a 2.5D perspective and featuring a range of classic and new characters, *Sonic Rush* is set to be a pure racing experience and is likely to appeal to both new and old fans.



NOVEMBER '06

MEGA DRIVE COLLECTION

Released: 24 November

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP, PS2

If you listen very carefully you can hear us munching down on a rather large slice of humble pie.

Now that we've actually played Sega's Mega Drive Collection, we can safely say beyond a shadow of a doubt that it's the greatest retro compilation to ever appear on Sony's PSP. High praise indeed when you consider how much we loved Capcom Classics Collection Remixed.



DECEMBER '06

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Date: December

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Oh lordy, it's a *Zelda* game for the DS and it looks the business. While *Phantom Hourglass* features a similar graphical style to *The Wind Waker,* it's set to make full use of the DS's unique abilities and will allow for competitive play against another DS owner. With everything from Link's movement to combat being controlled by the stylus this could well be the most unique *Zelda* yet.



DECEMBER '06

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS

Released: 01 December

Publisher: Ignition

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

As great as the original Neo Geo Pocket version was, we're expecting the DS outing to be even better – mainly due to the fact that it will be fully controlled via the stylus. It's unclear whether there will be two different versions, or if it will be a direct port of the original, but providing the play mechanics stay the same SNK Playmore can't possibly lose with this one.



FEBRUARY '07

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION VOL 2

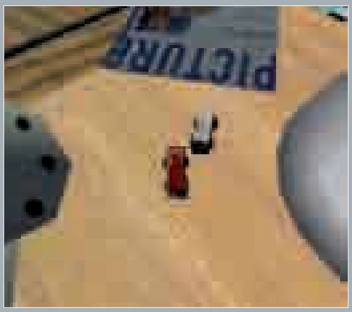
Released: 02 February

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £19.99

Format: PS2, Xbox

So then, Capcom's second PS2 and Xbox compilation contains all the games that featured on the first PSP compilation that hadn't been included on the first PS2 compilation, as well as all the games from the second PSP compilation that didn't appear on the first PS2 compilation. Confused? We are. All you have to do now is decide whether you want to play them at home or on the move.



FEBRUARY '07

MICRO MACHINES

Released: February

Publisher: Codemasters

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

We're not too sure why there's been such a lengthy delay, but if the Nintendo DS version is half as much fun as the recent PSP and PlayStation 2 outings then Sub Editor Luke Smith is going to be very happy indeed, as it's pretty much the only thing he ever plays in the office. We've yet to have seen any actual code, but hopes are high that *Micro Machines V4* will capture all the competitive atmosphere of the excellent Mega Drive original.

HIGH SCORE

JOUST

HAS WILLIAMS' CLASSIC GOT YOU IN A FLAP? DISCOVER THE LAWS OF ENGAGEMENT, COURTESY OF AMERICAN TRIAL ATTORNEY AND JOUST CHAMP STEVE SANDERS

Landing in arcades in 1982, *Joust* replaced the usual fire button with one simply marked 'flap'. Sat astride an accommodating ostrich, players were forced to wing it and engage their flying foe armed with just a protruding lance. Dismounting the flock of enemies involved swooping into them, ensuring your weapon was higher than your adversary, and then swiftly collecting the resulting egg.

Joust was one of the earliest games to offer a co-operative mode. Two players could tackle the feathered onslaught simultaneously and some waves even rewarded both knights for completing the round unscathed. More competitive Jousters could still craftily unseat their ally of course, a manoeuvre usually accompanied by an insincere, "Sorry mate".

The sequel allowed players to instantly exchange their mount for a winged horse, but the punishing difficulty and rarity of the cabinet makes *Joust 2* an acquired taste. The original though remains a perennial favourite, as illustrated by its inclusion on numerous retro compilations and current renaissance through Xbox Live Arcade.



» Steve at Funspot arcade, sitting on his bum, Jousting.

THE EXPERT

"Maybe this is my midlife crisis," smiles Steve Sanders. Certainly, trying to regain the *Joust* crown he wore as a youth is a lot more dignified than buying a Porsche and chasing girls 20 years his junior.

But then Steve had his crisis a long time ago. As a teenager, he was a member of the high scoring elite. He represented his country as part of the National Videogames Team, he appeared in 1982's famous Life magazine spread, which pictured the world's best arcade players and his scores graced the pages of the Guinness Book Of Records in the eighties. He became a bestselling author, when his guide to mastering *Donkey Kong* sold almost 40,000 copies. He even dropped out of the University of Missouri to pursue a career in gaming full-time and his joystick skills earned him a staggering $10,000 during his year as a pro.

Yet Steve couldn't help thinking he was wasting his life in the arcades. He retired in his prime and returned to his studies, eventually qualifying as an attorney and now heading up his own law firm. Is there not a parallel though between the cut and thrust of the courtroom and the jousting of his playing days?

"It's all about the winning," Steve acknowledges. "In the American adversarial system, there's always a winner and a loser. I enjoy the game."

And now he's back doing it on screen as well. After a hiatus of two decades, a visit by a film crew making a documentary on the legendary players of the Golden Age rekindled his love of lances and ostriches. He's determined to reclaim his title as the premier Jouster on tournament setting and with a personal best of over 800K, he's fast approaching the magic million mark.

"It's about being the best at something. I want to be the best trial attorney in Kansas City and the best *Joust* player in the world. I'm not there yet, but man, I'm having as much fun as I've had in my life trying."

Now who said you can't mix business and pleasure?

THE KNOWLEDGE

Most people tend to flap as fast as they can, especially when they find themselves in trouble. That is just what the *Joust* programmers had in mind. Consequently, they programmed the buzzards to be able to out-fly the ostriches, no matter how fast your fingers are. The trick is to slow down – way down. Position on the screen is vastly more important than flap speed. If you slow down or literally stop, coming to rest on a ledge and watch how the buzzards then attack, you will quickly learn how and when to flap to beat them.

The black/blue buzzards are the fastest of the enemies, but also the easiest to fool. For example, if you remain stationary on the bottom ledge, the black buzzards will slow way down, and walk – not fly – off the ledges above in order to come down to your level. Wait for a buzzard to walk off an upper ledge toward you and a split-second before it lands near you, assuming you are positioned very close to where the buzzard is about to land, you can flap once and kill it. Similarly, standing on the extreme right or left of the lower middle ledge (known as the 'pterodactyl' ledge) when a black buzzard is walking off a ledge above you will cause your enemy to commit hara-kiri without even so much as a flap from your ostrich.

Most readers will be familiar with the pterodactyl cheat, but many will not know that it is hard to find a cheat-chip game left in existence. The fixed games will nevertheless allow an experienced Jouster to hunt pterodactyls at the beginning of each pterodactyl wave (wave eight and every fifth subsequent wave). On waves that have the pterodactyl ledge present, your ostrich should begin the wave standing in the centre, or right of centre, of this ledge. Stand and wait for the pterodactyls and they will fly right into your lance if you face them. On waves without it, you should stand on the bottom ledge just a

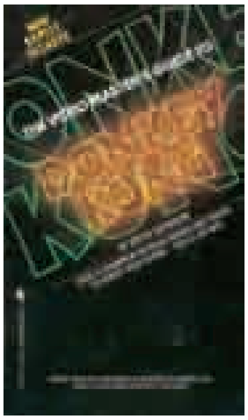
» When he's not lancing buzzards, Steve's writing books on how to kill gorillas. RSPCA take note.

HIGH SCORE NEWS

"It's comparable to the Dennis Law back heel goal against United in the early Seventies that sent them down." Thus Gary Whelan describes the joy of reaching the seven-figure mark on *Galaxian* – 1,114,520 to be precise – a feat that took him almost 4 hours. Yet his triumph is bittersweet, as with the swooping aliens well and truly defeated, Gary ponders how to spend his evenings while the missus watches the soaps…

Another entrant into the millionaires club this month – Steve Wiebe has scored a phenomenal 1,049,100 on *Donkey Kong*. He's been there before, but his previous efforts were dogged in controversy, after Twin Galaxies questioned whether the arcade board he was playing on met their stringent rules. This time, the score was achieved on a regular *Donkey Kong* machine and we await the official announcement with interest…

This column hits the silver screen! Well sort of. *High Score*, the award-winning documentary of one man's attempt to beat the *Missile Command* marathon record, has its UK premier at the Broadway cinema in Nottingham on 26 October. The star of the film Bill Carlton will be present, along with UK *MC* champ Tony Temple. And there just happens to be an *MC* cabinet in the foyer…





» An all-American boy in London last year…



» Steve's wife Nancy worries about cake design when he finally breaks the *Joust* record.



» The rare cocktail cabinet, offering some side-by-side flapping.





» Use Steve's expert advice and you could become a dap-hand at *Joust* – but obviously nowhere near as good as he is.

"IT'S ALL ABOUT THE WINNING IN THE AMERICAN ADVERSARIAL SYSTEM"

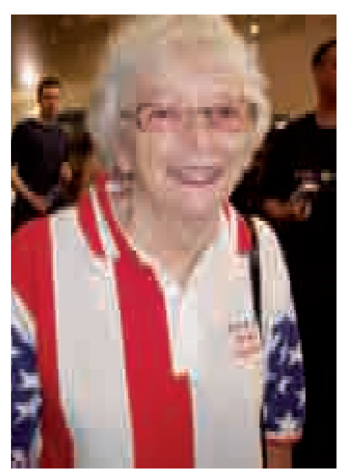
STEVE SANDERS

few steps to the right of the left-side lava and they'll fly right into your lance and die.

For advanced Jousters, who are good but cannot quite marathon the game, the most important trick is to learn how to play the top of the screen. For most of the first 100 waves, it makes sense to play the bottom or sometimes the centre. After wave 100, the bottom of the screen becomes a much less inviting prospect and wise Jousters fly to the top. But not all the way. One is tempted to try to hug the top by flapping very quickly and with an even rhythm. However, the buzzards are better than the best ostriches I've ever played, and this hug-to-top strategy will yield many deaths. The better idea is to play a centimetre or two below the top. This causes the buzzards to bounce off the top and repeatedly fly down a centimetre or so and then bounce off the top again – thus creating a series of elongated U shapes to their flight pattern. When they bounce down, it is relatively easy to position your ostrich to the left and then back to the right a bit, all the while maintaining your height of a centimetre or so below the top. This back-and-forth and flapping will yield many kills and when mastered, will allow you to make it through many of the most difficult waves without a single death. Hello marathon!

DORIS SELF 1925-2006

Retro Gamer is saddened to hear of the tragic death of *Q*Bert* queen Doris Self at the age of 81. She was involved in a fatal car accident whilst driving to a poker game last month. Doris, featured in this column in RG 22, held the *Q*Bert* record in the early Eighties, despite only taking up videogaming in her fifties and continued to play competitively until the end. At CGEuk last year, she not only dazzled all with her gaming skills, nonchalantly notching up several million before going for an afternoon nap, she charmed everyone with her Southern manner and twinkling smile. The Grande Dame of the arcades will be sorely missed.



PHANTASY STAR FOREVER

SONIC TEAM'S PHANTASY STAR HAS GROWN FROM A HUMBLE 8-BIT RPG INTO A HUGE ONLINE BEHEMOTH. KEY DEVELOPERS OF THE FRANCHISE EXPLAIN HOW IT'S EVOLVED OVER THE LAST 19 YEARS



BEFORE THEY WERE FAMOUS...

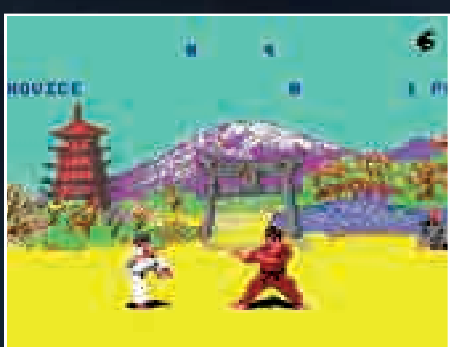
Everyone knows the games they're famous for, but what titles were the likes of Matthew Smith, Don Priestly and Jon Ritman working on before they hit the big time? Retro Gamer reveals all

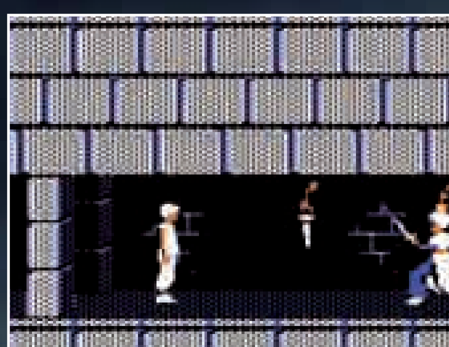
THE MAKING OF…

Discover how a humble 8-bit fighter helped form the backbone of one of Australia's most successful software houses

THE MAKING OF…

Starting off on the Apple II, *Prince Of Persia* soon leapt across to virtually every other console and computer available. Jordan Mechner spills the beans on its amazing success



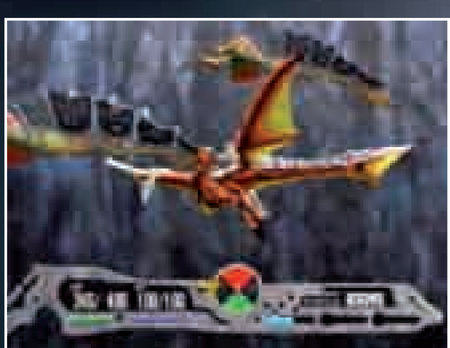


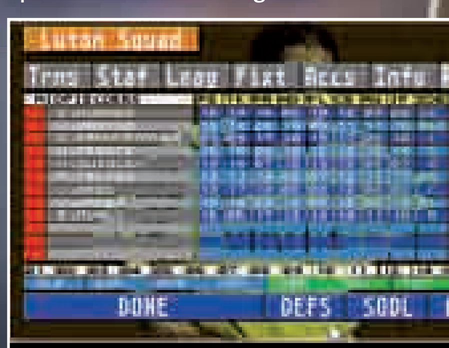
WHY YOU MUST PLAY...

Team Andromeda's classic RPG went largely unnoticed due to the death of the Saturn and low production numbers. Discover why it's still worth the £100+ it currently sells for

THE BIG INTERVIEW…

With the football season now in full swing, Kevin Toms and the Collyer brothers swap shirts with each other and discuss the strategy side of sports most beautiful game











THE DEFINITIVE...

After taking a month's break Stuart Campbell once again straps himself into a handy space craft. His game of choice? Xevious

AND THE REST...

Retro Rated
Eastern Promise
Back To The Eighties
Classic Game
Retro Revival
And much, much more

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THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

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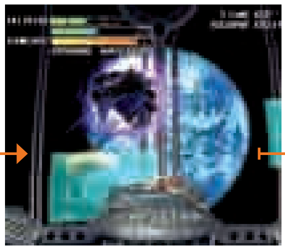


STRIDER 2

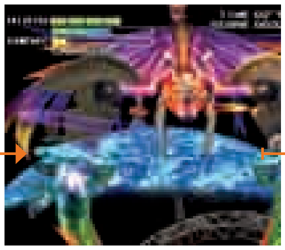
You can't keep a good megalomaniac down, so Capcom's coolest hero, Strider Hiryu, is once again sent out on a deadly mission to destroy the Grand Master one final time and hopefully save the world in the process. Easy…



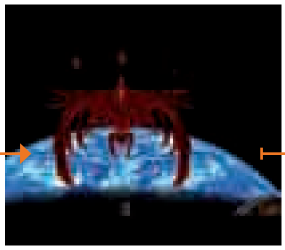
SCREEN 1
So it's come down to this… Strider Hiryu finds himself against an evil clone, whose skills easily equal his own. Fortunately, a cheap Ryu look-a-like isn't going to stop our hero, and, after an intense battle, the pretender is defeated and Strider battles on.



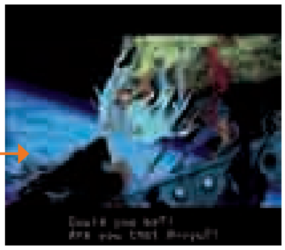
SCREEN 2
Strider Hien may have been relatively easy to defeat, but the Grand Master is quite a different matter. Zipping around the screen like a demented ring wraith, he's picked up some deadly skills since his defeat in the original game.



SCREEN 3
But what's this? The evil Grand Master may have be defeated, but now everyone's (all right, just Darran's) favourite ninja has to deal with this frightening looking fellow. Who said saving the world was easy eh?



SCREEN 4
Proving that his bark was ultimately more dangerous than his bite, Caduceus is ripped about by Strider's energy sword and dies an inglorious death high above the earth. As the enemy base explodes, Strider reports in on a job well done.



SCREEN 5
Yes, the game's finished but we couldn't end this article without mentioning the superb art that features throughout the game and relays *Strider 2*'s storyline. Here's the Grand Master realising that he may have met his troublesome adversary before.